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## From the Editor

Happy Spring, everyone. I have the honor—and the challenge—of taking over as managing editor of CTX in the place of Julia McClenon, who did yeoman's work producing the first three issues of this groundbreaking new journal. A word about myself: I have been a professional editor and publication manager for more than 12 years, specializing in the fields of nonproliferation, international relations, national security, and civil-military relations. Following a year with NATO Allied Command Transformation in Virginia, I was excited to be offered this opportunity to join the CTFP group and take over management of CTX. The journal has seen another important change in personnel since the last issue: We are sorry to say goodbye to layout and design editor Amelia Simunek, who did so much to help get the journal on its feet. Ryan Stuart now brings her skills to this role, and we are happy to welcome her to the CTX team.

This is a good moment to talk about my vision for the future of CTX, which is an unusual kind of publication in the military realm, written for practitioners, by practitioners. Most of its articles are in the first person, recounted by the people who've "been there, done that," offering CT operators the opportunity to learn from the experiences of their peer community around the world. It is especially important to me to preserve the unique voices of our contributors. I will work closely with new writers, and those for whom English is not a first, or even second, language, in a collaborative process to ensure your stories, rendered in clear, accessible English, remain your own.

From the beginning, CTX has encouraged submissions that challenge conventional wisdom or offer new perspectives and insights. The present issue offers some fine examples of what I have in mind. In the first two articles, LT Malaka Chandrasa of the Sri Lankan Navy describes the ways in which Sri Lanka's naval and air forces were able to abandon "legacy" thinking, adapt to the tactics of a tenacious, well-funded, well-armed insurgency, and gradually turn the tide of conflict from stalemate to victory.

The best ideas and intentions, however, may not pay off if operators don't have access to the information they need for planning. LTC Arjan Hilaj of the Albanian Army describes a well-intended mission to "win the hearts and minds" of Afghan villagers in a hostile area, that went awry simply from inadequate understanding of the local culture and conditions. His insights may help others with similar assignments.

From Central Asia we go to South Sudan, a new African country still struggling to establish itself since independence in 2011. Ceaseless border fighting with Sudan has taxed the young government, a situation that may be made worse by

Khartoum's adoption of targeted assassinations. Author Thon Agany Ayiei reflects on the implications of Khartoum's use of sophisticated intelligence and airstrike capabilities to kill a prominent Darfuri leader.

The last main article takes us back north to Iran, with a discussion of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' role in Iran's politics and economy. COL Sean Corrigan describes how the IRGC's position outside the structure of the regular armed forces, its privileged access to Iran's political power structure, and its extensive infiltration of both the licit and illicit economies of Iran, make it a primary target of internal dissent. This dissatisfaction, Corrigan suggests, may leave the IRGC vulnerable to disruption by the United States and its allies.

In this issue, we are introducing a new occasional column called State of the Art. Contributor Rachel Davis examines the similarities between high-profile terrorism, epitomized by the 9/11 attacks, and the work of high-profile conceptual artists such as Damien Hirst. My intent as editor is that contributions like this will inspire and provoke us to think differently than we normally do about terrorism, those who practice it, and those who work to stop it. If you have an idea you think is too far outside the box for publication, try me.

We have two book reviews for you this time: *Pakistan on the Brink*, Ahmed Rashid's new look at the Central Asian dilemma; and Rusty Bradley's *Lions of Kandahar*, a first-hand account of Operation Medusa in Kandahar, Afghanistan. Kalev I. Sepp reminds us, through his review of five films on the Irish Civil War, that there are lessons we can learn from that 100-year old conflict for dealing with current civil wars and insurgencies around the globe.

Finally, after you've read George Lober's column on military ethics, titled "Moral Courage—Take Two," give yourself time to think over it. He tackles a topic that, he suggests, may have an easy solution, but one that few seem willing to embrace.

Finally, as always, CTX remains a work in progress. I look forward to hearing from *you* what you would like to see in these pages.

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**George Lober** guides U.S. and international military students through the tricky terrain of ethics and critical thinking at the Naval Postgraduate School.

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# Learning from Our Enemies:

## Sri Lankan Naval Special Warfare against the Sea Tigers

*LT Malaka Chandradasa, Sri Lankan Navy*

*Enemies are our best teachers.*

—quote posted in house of Sea Tigers commander Colonel Soosai

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was one of the most effective—and brutal—insurgent movements of recent times. With the strategic goal of seceding from Sri Lanka and establishing a separate state to be known as “Tamil Eelam,” the LTTE waged a bloody war for 30 years, until the Sri Lankan military finally defeated it in May 2009.

The LTTE notably was one of the very few insurgent groups to develop operational sea capabilities.<sup>1</sup> Its ability to dominate the sea routes to south India, which provided the closest external sanctuary for LTTE fighters, and which enabled it to reinforce its operations by sea, proved crucial to the group’s longevity. The Sea Tigers, LTTE’s naval wing, was formed in the early 1980s and was highly effective, especially in its use of the Black Sea Tiger element, a waterborne unit of the Black Tigers, the LTTE’s elite, highly trained suicide force.

*In the contest at sea between the Sea Tigers and the Sri Lankan Navy, both sides learned lessons from each other and adapted accordingly.*

In the contest at sea between the Sea Tigers and the Sri Lankan Navy, both sides learned lessons from each other and adapted accordingly. This article will describe this interactive learning process and how the Sri Lankan Navy ultimately defeated the Sea Tigers.

### LTTE: Adaptations at Sea

The supreme leader of the LTTE, Velupillai Prabhakaran, formed the Sea Tigers in the early 1980s under the leadership of Thillaiyampalam Sivanesan, a tactical and strategic mastermind who went by the alias “Colonel Soosai.” The Sea Tigers started off using small boats and ferries to transport supplies and troops across the waters separating northern Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu province in the south of India, where the LTTE was widely supported.<sup>2</sup> The LTTE also owned its own international shipping network, which provided the equipment and logistics needed by the group’s fighters, known as the Tamil Tigers.



*Various LTTE Attack Craft*



Initial attempts by the Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) to hinder these operations using its fleet of offshore patrol vessels were somewhat successful, but those efforts led the Sea Tigers to adapt. The insurgents locally manufactured their own fiberglass fast-attack craft, equipping the larger boats with four 250-horsepower, outboard engines and the smaller boats with two engines. These faster craft, with their more powerful engines, allowed the Sea Tigers to outrun the slower SLN patrols. The Sea Tigers' boats were mainly the 45-kilotonne "Thrikka," with four crew members and a machine gun; the 10-kilotonne "Sudai," carrying a single machine gun; the 45-kilotonne "Muraj" or "Waverider," with a crew of 10; and the "Idayan," a 45-kilotonne suicide craft. The Muraj was used mainly as a command vessel and is comparable in most ways to the SLN's own inshore patrol craft.

The Sea Tigers lacked their own harbors or secure launching sites, so they adapted by engineering a method of launching their boats using tractors and trailers. This enabled them to launch from any beachfront location they could access. The LTTE would hide the craft inshore, sometimes more than 10 kilometers away from the beach, and would launch only when necessary. This gave the LTTE mobility, flexibility, and the element of surprise.

The Sea Tigers' most successful innovation was their use of the "wolf pack" tactic.<sup>3</sup> Once the Sea Tigers identified a target, five or more of their small boats would approach the target craft, engage it from all directions, and prevent it from fleeing the area. While these small boats engaged the target, a suicide craft would move toward the target boat using the cover of the larger command vessels. These suicide boats were usually small, fiberglass boats manned by a single Black Tiger. The hull of the boat was packed with high explosives and rigged to a pressure trigger located at the craft's pointed prow, set to detonate the explosives when the suicide pilot rammed the target vessel.

## Sri Lankan Navy: Not Equipped for Sea Tiger Fight

The Sri Lankan Navy began as a ceremonial force left behind by the British Empire, and was predominantly used as a logistics support element of the Sri Lankan Army. In the 1990s, the SLN had only large ships, mostly inherited from the Royal Navy or gifted by friendly nations. While these were well-suited for blue-water patrolling operations to safeguard against unauthorized fishing or smuggling, they definitely were no match for the heavily armed, small-boat, coastal operations conducted by



*Suicide Craft with Plastic Explosive  
Connected to Pressure Fuses*

the Sea Tigers. In other words, the LTTE boats were the ideal asymmetrical match for the SLN's large, less maneuverable, conventional fleet.

By the early 1990s, the Navy understood that it needed to adapt and become a more aggressive fighting force to dominate the lagoon/mangrove swamps of the Jaffna peninsula and eastern areas, and counter the mounting threat posed by the Sea Tigers. Consequently, in 1993 the Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF) formed the Special Boat Squadron (SBS), modeled after the British Navy's elite Special Boat Service and the U.S. Navy's elite SEALs, under the command of then-LCDR Ravindra Chandrasiri Wijegunaratne (presently RADM and the Northern Area Naval Commander). The SBS carried out its first operation in November 1993, when it played an integral part in the recapture of a Navy camp in Pooneryn, which had been attacked and overrun by terrorists.

At sea, the Sri Lankan Navy's first line of response were Israeli-built Dvora craft.<sup>4</sup> In an interview, Admiral Wasantha Karrannagoda, former commander of the Sri Lankan Navy, said that in its search for the right platform to counter the Sea Tigers, the SLN found that "the Israeli Navy was facing a similar threat and were using Dvora fast-attack craft as a response." The Dvoras provided an effective response to the LTTE's logistics boats, which were used by the insurgents mainly to transport supplies from their ships operating in international waters, and to smuggle supplies and personnel in and out of south India. The Navy's 4th Fast Attack Flotilla, also known as the Dvora Squadron, was at the forefront of the fight against the Sea Tigers, protecting both naval and civilian transport vessels.



*Super Dvora MK II*

The Dvoras, however, proved vulnerable to the LTTE's wolf pack attacks because of the Dvoras' limited close-contact capabilities and maneuverability. The Sea Tigers managed to engage these boats successfully, sinking more than 20 of them.<sup>5</sup> The Sea Tigers also continued their successful attacks against larger vessels, sinking transport ships and gunboats at will, and attacking civilian ships bearing supplies to the north and east.

## Sri Lankan Navy Makes Successful Adaptations

The realization that the heavier Dvoras were no match for the small, fast-moving, and lightly-crewed boats of the Sea Tigers in shallower seas came at a high cost. The SBS experimented with smaller, lighter craft, including rubber combat-reconnaissance craft, but most were too small and slow, and proved highly ineffective against the Sea Tigers. At this point, the Sri Lankan Navy appeared to be at a dead end, unable to match or counter the naval capabilities of the Sea Tigers.

This changed in 2006, when a Sri Lankan Navy SBS operation, led by LCDR Mudiyanseelage Bandula Disanayake (who was injured during a LTTE attack in 2009 and retired from the Navy in 2012), discovered



*SLN Arrow Boat used by the SBS*



where the LTTE was manufacturing the 16-foot boats its forces used for their wolf-pack attacks. SBS personnel found a boat buried in the ground at the site, which was later recovered and brought to the Navy dockyard at Trincomalee. Navy engineers reverse-engineered a version of this boat, which became the SLN's first 16-foot Arrow Boat. The small, highly maneuverable boat was fitted with a 12.7 mm main gun and an automatic grenade launcher on the stern. Two 115-horsepower outboard engines propelled it to speeds in excess of 25 knots.



*SLN Arrow Boat used by the SBS*

With the guidance and encouragement of then-SLN Commander VADM Wasantha Karannagoda, Navy engineers continued to experiment with different configurations of this base model. The experiments yielded two more versions of the Arrow Boat, the 18-footer and the highly successful 23-foot model, which went into mass production. The 23-footer was manned by four people: a coxswain, main gunner, stern gunner, and side gunner. It could be fitted with a 12.7 mm, 23 mm, or 30 mm main gun (some even were equipped with twin cannon versions); a 12.7 mm or automatic grenade launcher stern gun; and two 7.62 mm Chinese multi-purpose machine guns at the sides. Powered by two 250-horsepower engines, the boat boasted speeds of up to 35 knots.

During the period from 2007 to 2009, 200 of the 23-foot Arrow Boats were produced at the Navy's dockyard in Welisara.<sup>6</sup> These boats, though small, are capable of operating in conditions up to Sea State-4.<sup>7</sup> The boats' significantly shallower draft allows mobility in extremely shallow waters, while the comparatively narrow beam presents a smaller target at sea, and makes targeting from land almost impossible.

## Making Gains against Insurgents

The combination of high firepower with a maneuverable, high-speed platform gave these Arrow Boats the ability to engage the smaller Sea Tiger boats on their own terms, fighting one-on-one at close quarters.<sup>8</sup> The most credible testament to the success of these small Arrow Boats came from the Sea Tigers themselves, who described the difficulties of countering the SLN's new fleet of small boats.

While the Arrow Boats provided the much-needed platform to counter the Sea Tigers, the Navy's training, operational, and tactical doctrines also underwent drastic changes. The Navy introduced the operational concept of four layers of "defense barriers." This concept made use of the Navy's flagship and larger offshore vessels in the outermost layer, gun boats in the next layer landward, the Dvoras in the second layer from land, and the Arrow Boats as the first line of defense in coastal waters. This layered system offered protection and offensive capability against the movements of the Sea Tigers, and helped prevent the Sea Tigers from bringing in troops and equipment from ships in international waters, or from southern India to the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka. It also prevented the LTTE leadership from escaping Sri Lanka by sea during the latter stages of the conflict.

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*The combination of high firepower on a highly maneuverable, high-speed platform gave these Arrow Boats the ability to engage the smaller Sea Tiger boats on their own terms.*

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The SBS also developed a specific tactical formation for using these Arrow Boats. The formation was led by one command boat, either a Waverider or an inshore patrol craft, equipped with electro-optical devices and radar capabilities.<sup>9</sup> This command boat served as the eyes and ears of the smaller boats when patrolling and monitoring the Sea Tigers' movements. Because the smaller boats did not have radar capability and their personnel had only limited vision, particularly

at night when the crew members had to rely on night-vision goggles, the command boats played a vital role in detecting and engaging the Sea Tigers.

When encountering larger enemy craft that were operating individually, the Arrow Boats imitated the swarming tactics of the Sea Tigers. For smaller enemy craft, the Arrow Boats would engage in close-quarter fighting, sometimes closing within 20 meters of the enemy boats, in what could be compared to dogfights between fighter jets. The possibility that the Sea Tiger boat formations included suicide vessels made every episode of close contact a potentially deadly ordeal.

The attack patterns of the Sea Tigers from 2006 to 2009 clearly illustrate the success of the SLN's operations. In 2006, Sea Tigers engaged the Navy offensively more than 21 times. In 2007, the number of confrontations was 12. In 2008, there were fewer than five confrontations, and finally by 2009, the Sea Tigers were defeated.

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## Notes

- 1 Arabinda Acharya and Nadeeka P. Withana, "Groups with Maritime Terrorist Capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region," in *Maritime Security in the Indian Ocean Region: Critical Issues in Debate*, ed. V. R. Raghavan and W. Lawrence S. Prabhakar (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 2008), 204–7; Peter Lehr, "Asymmetric Warfare in the Indian Ocean: What Kind of Threat from What Kind of Actor," in Raghavan and Prabhakar, *Maritime Security*, 173, 178–79; Rohan Gunaratna, "The Asymmetric Threat from Maritime Terrorism," *Jane's Navy International*, Oct. 1, 2001.
- 2 While there is a vast amount of conflicting literature regarding the involvement of India and Tamil Nadu with the LTTE, many in the region are sure that the Tigers enjoyed strong support among the population and politicians of Tamil Nadu.
- 3 The Sea Tigers also developed new tactics and operations using suicide submersibles, floating sea mines, and suicide divers.
- 4 The Dvora or fast attack craft were initially purchased from Israel and later from the United States. The Colombo Dockyard also manufactured these craft.
- 5 The numbers are taken from reports in "Humanitarian Operation Factual Analysis: July 2006–May 2009," from the Ministry of Defence, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, July 2011; retrieved from [http://www.defence.lk/news/20110801\\_Conf.pdf](http://www.defence.lk/news/20110801_Conf.pdf). These figures include only naval vessels destroyed by attacks. Some underwater suicide divers are known to have used submersible vehicles.
- 6 By the end of 2009, the Navy's dockyard in Walisara had completed 200 Arrow Boats. The Defense Secretary of Sri Lanka put the 100th boat under way ceremonially on September 11, 2008. Dhaneshi Yatawara, "SLN launches 100th Arrow Boat" *Sunday Observer*, Sept. 14, 2008; retrieved from <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2008/09/14/sec02.asp/>.
- 7 Sea state is the general condition of the sea's surface, with respect to wind, waves and swell at a certain location and moment. Sea State-4 is classified as moderate seas with swells of 1.25 to 2.5 meters.
- 8 These boats carried no armor to provide defense. The weight and other constraints associated with armor proved to be a hindrance in the battle space.
- 9 Waverider is a larger patrol craft that was designed and manufactured by the Navy Dockyard. This was modeled after the "Indumathi" craft captured from the LTTE. Inshore patrol craft are boats smaller than the Dvora, manned by about 12 people, with the ability to carry radar and EOD systems.

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## Photos

All photos courtesy of the author.

# Airpower in Irregular Warfare: The Sri Lankan Experience

*LT Malaka Chandradasa*

Airpower is strategically important in conventional warfare. The ability to bypass an enemy's land and naval forces and directly target its political, economic, and industrial hubs can prove tremendously advantageous in state-on-state warfare. Yet, the application of strategic air power in the context of irregular conflicts is problematic for even the world's most sophisticated militaries.

In most cases, insurgent forces do not possess industrial or economic strongholds that can be attacked with airpower. Nor are insurgents typically distinguishable from the civilian population, which puts civilians at risk in the event of an aerial assault. Nevertheless, over more than three decades, the Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF) learned to utilize airpower effectively as part of the larger effort to defeat the insurgent forces of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Instead of indiscriminately bombing the areas held by insurgents and thereby antagonizing the population who were sympathetic to the insurgent cause, the Air Force, along with the other military forces of the government, developed a counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine to overcome the LTTE. Specifically, the Air Force provided air superiority; logistical support; close-air support; precision bombing; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; search and rescue; and access to denied areas.

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*These attacks [on the capital city] by the LTTE meant that the SLAF not only had to support land and naval forces in its COIN operations, but also had to fight to maintain its dominance, or even control, of Sri Lankan airspace.*

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All of these responsibilities fell to a service that just a few years earlier had been primarily a ceremonial force. The Sri Lankan Air Force was established as the Royal Ceylon Air Force in 1951, but did not possess a single aircraft until 1971. In contrast, the LTTE leadership quickly understood the advantage of even a limited air capability. In the mid-1980s, the LTTE began training pilots and building improvised aircraft, a move that would eventually compel the SLAF to improve its own capabilities. By 2005, the insurgent forces had a fleet of two Micro Light Aircraft, five Light Aircraft (ZLIN 143), two helicopters, and two remote controlled planes.<sup>1</sup> The LTTE also procured shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), which it used to shoot down five SLAF flights and two commercial aircraft, killing 256 people.

These attacks by the LTTE meant that the SLAF not only had to support land and naval forces in its COIN operations, but also had to fight to maintain its dominance, or even control, of Sri Lankan airspace. The consequences of the SLAF's failure to maintain control was made abundantly clear when the LTTE successfully attacked the capital city of Colombo and Sri Lanka's only international airport, destroying lives as well as many civilian aircraft, and causing heavy damage to the country's economy. The SLAF was also severely handicapped in its ground support role because of the LTTE's acquisition and utilization of enormous numbers of surface-to-air missiles.

The Sri Lankan Air Force was initially slow to adapt. Air Chief Marshal Roshan Goonetilleke observed,

At first the military was developing its aerial capabilities as a reaction to the enhancements and development the LTTE was doing. The LTTE was also developing its military capability every year with new equipment and increased recruitment. At that time, I must say, we were reactive. We were not prepared. We were not proactive. It was only when the LTTE procured new weaponry, we armed ourselves in reaction. Even passenger-carrying helicopters were fitted with guns, and we were compelled to adopt many similar ad hoc arrangements to counter the threat. Well, we went on; finally, at a particular time when the terrorist acquired missiles, we got into a very difficult situation, as we were not prepared for that.<sup>2</sup>

## The SLAF Adapts to Fulfill Its Missions

With the escalation of violence in 2005 and the breakdown of a cease-fire agreement between the LTTE and Sri Lanka, President Mahinda Rajapaksa and his defense secretary spearheaded a full-scale counterinsurgency campaign, which eventually defeated the LTTE and the insurgency. For this successful campaign, the Sri Lankan Air Force was utilized in a more indirect and population-centric method than had been the case earlier in the conflict.

### Air Superiority

Air superiority and dominance is the primary objective of any air force. But for the Sri Lankan Air Force, achieving air superiority was difficult because its aircraft did not have the capability to intercept the type of low-flying civilian aircraft that the LTTE adapted for its attacks. After the first two attacks by the LTTE in 2007, the SLAF came under sharp criticism and quickly reorganized. It purchased six Chinese F7G interceptors capable of engaging the LTTE planes, and installed air defenses in Colombo and its suburbs. Additionally, the Sri Lankan government established links with international partners to train and assist the Air Force to counter the LTTE anti-air capability.

### Logistics

While logistically supporting government COIN efforts was a primary role for the SLAF from the onset of the conflict, the Air Force modernized its equipment with the purchase of two Lockheed C-130 Hercules and 11 Chinese heavy-lift aircraft. These acquisitions enabled it to support the requirements of the high-intensity military operations of the final phase (2005–2009) of combat.

### Close Air Support

To enhance its air-to-ground attack capabilities, the Air Force purchased Russian-built Mil Mi-24 gunships (attack helicopters) and Israeli-built Kfirs. The SLAF also bought Russian MiG-27 ground-attack aircraft. While the Sri Lankan Air Force had always had a close air support role, the most critical aspect of this mission involved coordination with ground troops. Recognizing this, the Sri Lankan military increased training for both pilots and ground troops.

### Precision Bombing

Prior to 2005, the SLAF conducted bombing raids without air surveillance or ground support. These indiscriminate, imprecise raids on areas under enemy control were often counterproductive, serving to reinforce LTTE propaganda that highlighted the government's brutality. The damage caused by these attacks radicalized the Tamil population in those areas and generated recruitment opportunities for the insurgents. The LTTE also publicized the bombings

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*After 2005, the SLAF introduced precision strike munitions and incorporated targeting from ground support units, which resulted in less unintended damage during air raids and helped to undermine the LTTE's propaganda.*

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through their media outlets to generate sympathy among the Tamil diaspora, and attract more funding. Although the horrific reports on websites like TamilNet, Sri Lankan Genocide, TamilNation, and others were largely fabricated, the destruction caused by the SLAF bombing raids gave them an air of truth.<sup>3</sup>

After 2005, the SLAF introduced precision-strike munitions and incorporated targeting from ground support units, which resulted in less unintended damage during air raids and helped to undermine the LTTE's propaganda. The deep-penetration units of the Army and Navy were trained to direct precision air strikes on enemy targets.<sup>4</sup> In November 2007, the Army's Long Range Patrol (LRP) team guided the SLAF in an operation that destroyed the bunker of Suppayya Paramu Tamilchelvam, the leader of the LTTE's political wing, and killed him, without causing damage to any surrounding house or person.<sup>5</sup>

## Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)

The ability to gather ISR using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) was an asset that the government and its military leadership quickly adopted to great effect. The Air Force integrated its UAV capabilities with a digital infrastructure; a secure, high-speed data transfer network; and real-time data links from live feeds to create a centralized command and control center in Colombo. This allowed personnel in Air Force headquarters, the president, and the defense secretary to obtain a first-hand view of operations. Later, this capability was extended to other military services. At the division commander level of the Army, field commanders were able to gather real-time inputs from behind enemy lines. This information helped ground troops avoid inflicting civilian casualties and collateral damage, and also enabled them to secure escape routes for civilians trapped by the LTTE. One Air Force pilot described the operations this way:

Beechcraft or UAV surveillance aircraft remained over the targets while interdictions were taking place. This enabled first-hand battle damage assessment as well as contributed towards further improving targeting accuracy. In addition, the greatest achievement was ensuring positive identification of civilian settlements, enabling the ground forces to avoid them during engagement. Last minute changes were made to battle plans based on live footage from aerial observation platforms.<sup>6</sup>

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*The ability to infiltrate deep inside enemy terrain was vital to the success of the military offensive. It also raised the morale of the troops, who knew military units in distress could be rescued even if they were miles inside enemy territory.*

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ISR also helped counter enemy propaganda. The government, at times, provided video from unmanned aerial vehicles and other aerial surveillance tools to the international and national media to disprove the LTTE's claims that the Sri Lankan military forces were engaged in genocide. The ability to show not only the citizens of Sri Lanka, but also the population of the world that the military's targets were legitimate enemy locations and not civilians (as had been claimed by the LTTE's media and its international supporters) proved crucial for gaining and maintaining support for the government's military campaign.

## Search, Rescue, Medevac, and Infiltration/Exfiltration

Over the course of the conflict, the Air Force mastered this range of missions. Initially, there had been limited coordination between ground and air forces, and pilots were not well trained for these types of missions. These problems led to instances in which deep-penetration troops were lost, or sometimes had to carry their wounded comrades for more than 25 miles before they were picked up by friendly units.<sup>7</sup> The ability to infiltrate deep inside enemy terrain was vital to the success of the military offensive. It also raised the morale of the troops, who knew military units in distress could be rescued even if they were miles inside enemy territory.

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*Medical camps... to help communities affected by the war, and the ability to evacuate critically injured civilians by air... were welcome developments for the local people.*

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## Projecting Government Control and Legitimacy in Denied Areas

The Sri Lankan government understood the need to quickly legitimize its authority in liberated areas that had previously supported the LTTE. Unlike previous governments, which had waited for military operations to conclude before trying to establish civilian authority in these areas, the current government was keen to extend its writ while military activities were still underway. To do so, the government took advantage of the Air Force's ability to gain access to these denied areas.

As soon as the eastern areas of the country were liberated, the Sri Lankan president and other government officials used the Air Force for passage into these regions, even holding a cabinet meeting in the disputed city of Trincomalee in 2006. Colombo hoped that bringing in government officials to reestablish civilian administrative operations, which had been neglected or abandoned in areas under enemy control, could help normalize the situation and re-legitimize the rule of the government in the eyes of the population. The government also invited national and international media along, to show the world and the nation's citizenry that the government was now in control of formerly contested areas.

The SLAF also helped win the population's support in these areas through its humanitarian efforts. Medical camps to help communities affected by the war, and the ability to evacuate critically injured civilians by air for proper medical care in the capital, were welcome developments for the local people. Air Force logistical capabilities transported essential supplies to liberated areas even while land and sea routes remained dangerous or denied.

In the end, a growing appreciation for the utility of air power in combination with COIN efforts helped make it possible for the Sri Lankan government to overcome the LTTE. It is rare that a terrorist organization is defeated through military means, and as this discussion makes clear, the Sri Lankan Air Force played an integral part in the government's eventual victory.

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## Notes

- 1 Extracted from the Humanitarian Operation Fact Analysis, a document distributed in 2001 to the heads of foreign missions in Sri Lanka by the Defense Ministry. Most of these civilian aircraft were fitted with improvised bomb-carrying and release mechanisms.
- 2 From a 2009 interview with Chief Marshal Roshan Goonetilleke, RWP & BAR, VSV, USP, NDC, PSC, the current joint chief of staff and former commander of the Sri Lankan Air Force. Goonetilleke commanded the SLAF in the final battles against the LTTE from 2006 to the end of the insurgency in 2009. He presented these ideas in an interview shortly after the President of Sri Lanka declared an end to military operations and victory against the LTTE in 2009.
- 3 "Sri Lanka Air Force Bombs Schools in Jaffna," (November/December 1993), retrieved from TamilNation.org website: <http://tamilnation.co/indictment/indict071.htm>, (accessed December 6, 2011).
- 4 The Deep Penetration Units of the Sri Lankan military conducted operations inside enemy-held territory. These teams included Sri Lankan Army Commando Regiment Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) Unit, SF Long Range Patrol (LRP) group, and Sri Lankan Navy SBS LRP group. They were trained to direct air strikes on identified targets inside enemy territory.
- 5 Brigadier SP Thamilselvan was head of the LTTE's political wing and one of the group's top leaders. On November 2, 2007, a precision attack on his hideout killed him and five other LTTE leaders. "Senior Tamil Tiger Leader Killed," *BBC News*, Nov. 2, 2007: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7074450.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7074450.stm).
- 6 These views on the development of ISR and its effect on the final stages of the war were expressed by a Sri Lankan Air Force pilot, who requested to remain anonymous.
- 7 As a member of a Sri Lankan Navy SBS unit, the author saw, heard about, and experienced such situations. He also is aware of the mental impact on troops who know that air support is available when they are behind enemy lines.

# Operation “Jatagani”: Working to Win the Hearts and Minds of the Afghan People

*LTC Arjan Hilaj, Albanian Army*

For almost 11 years, coalition forces in Afghanistan have been battling an insurgency in a very complicated environment that includes Islamic religious fanatics, warlords, and common criminals. Kinetic actions are not enough to prevail. In this protracted war, winning the support of the population is imperative.

Former International Security Assistance Force commander General David Petraeus, in his 2010 guidance on the conduct of counterinsurgency operations against insurgents, placed renewed stress on the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan people if operations are to succeed: “The decisive terrain is the human terrain. The people are the center of gravity. Only by providing them security and earning their trust and confidence can the Afghan government and ISAF prevail.”<sup>1</sup> With these guidelines in mind, a combined Albanian–U.S. Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) called “Striking Eagles 1” conducted an operation codenamed “Jatagani” in mid-December 2011. The operation, which I led, was conducted in conjunction with the Afghan National Army (ANA) battalion with which the OMLT was embedded, and with other U.S. Marine and Army personnel.

*Despite making all possible preparations to maximize the chances for a successful mission... the “fog of war” persisted... [and] obscured the “human terrain.”*

The commander’s plan for the operation included the conduct of a “key leader engagement” with the elders of the village of Shine Shavara, as well as the distribution of humanitarian aid (school and hygiene kits) to the village’s children, and medical check-ups for adults and children. It was hoped that these efforts would extend the influence of the Afghan government and army and the coalition forces, increase military control in an area hostile to the Afghan military and government, and undermine support for the insurgents by projecting a favorable image of coalition forces to friendly, neutral, and hostile audiences. All of this effort, ultimately, was designed to “win the hearts and minds” by removing the root causes of unrest on which the insurgency fed.<sup>2</sup>

## Preparing in the Dark

Despite making all possible preparations to maximize the chances for a successful mission, Operation Jatagani would prove yet again that in the battlefield environment, the “fog of war” persists. In this case, however, the fog of war also obscured the “human terrain.”

Initial coordination for this operation was started in November 2011 by the U.S. deputy commander of the OMLT, who tapped



*LTC Hilaj with his ANA counterpart talking to the elders of the villages.*

into the vast logistic supply lines of the U.S. Forces–Afghanistan to secure the necessary humanitarian aid the operation would deliver. Meanwhile, I continued to work out the specifics of the operation with the Afghan battalion commander. We selected this particular village, Shine Shavara, because reports indicated that the population was not friendly and because our interpreters spoke of the villagers in contemptible terms. The villagers were ethnic Pashtuns, former refugees in Pakistan who had settled in the area. Reconnaissance missions conducted by my team members confirmed that the villagers were hostile to coalition forces. For example, on two occasions, children threw stones at our vehicles as we passed through the village. In general, children are very good indicators of the overall mood of the people.

One of the difficulties that hindered our planning was a lack of useful intelligence. From our side, we developed the best intelligence we could. A week prior to the operation, we conducted site reconnaissance to locate the best possible place to conduct our key leader meeting with the village elders, and to determine where we should distribute our humanitarian aid and medical assistance. In addition, we contacted a human terrain team at our superior command, but found that they not only had no information about the village, but did not even know where this village was located. Our Afghan counterparts were not much help either. Bearing all this uncertainty in mind, I sized up my group's ability to cope with unpredictable events.

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*“When God created the world He had some spare rocks and steep mountains. With those, the Almighty created Afghanistan.”*  
*– Afghan proverb*

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The operation itself bore several tactical risks. First, we needed to ensure that the ANA forces would maintain proper fire discipline. (ANA soldiers had a reputation for opening fire at everything moving in front of their gun barrels when under attack.) Second, we were concerned about maintaining effective command and control, especially as we had never trained or conducted operations with more than half of OMLT. Lastly, the terrain itself, particularly the poor road conditions, posed risks. As one Afghan proverb puts it, “When God created the world he had some spare rocks and steep mountains. With those, the Almighty created Afghanistan.”<sup>3</sup>

## The Mission

Early in the morning on the first day of our mission, our coalition vehicles were lined up in column formation waiting for our Afghan counterparts, who, not surprisingly, arrived late. In all, 83 soldiers and 16 vehicles assembled for the operation. Before getting underway, I gave a short briefing to the ANA commander to reiterate all essential tasks to be performed.

Our first contact with the population occurred in a village adjacent to our objective. Initially indifferent to our presence, kids followed our slow-moving column through the narrow roads, which were barely wide enough to provide a few inches of clearance from the mud-brick walls on either side of the vehicles.



*LTC Hilaj briefs his ANA counterpart before departing for the mission.*

Immediately after we arrived at the main village and had established a security perimeter, I, as the commander of the operation, went to meet the elders of the village in front of the village's mosque. After the formal greeting and offer of tea from my hosts, I explained why we were there. While I was speaking about the benefits the villagers would get from supporting the Afghan government, the ANA, and the coalition forces, the Malik (the most senior among the elders) told me that “not every Pashtun or person who lives in



the mountains supports the Taliban insurgency.” All they wanted were better living conditions for themselves and their children. I also learned that other coalition forces had visited this village before us, but had not fulfilled their promises.

Despite our intentions and efforts, the population remained wary of us, at best, and some were openly hostile. Again, the children proved to be a useful indicator of the mood of the people. During our mission, the children were the most aggressive individuals and the hardest to control. Wave after wave of them stormed the site where the humanitarian assistance kits were being distributed and the area where the medics were dispensing medical aid. One of our vehicles was damaged by rocks thrown by children who did not receive the kits, and some of our gunners were slightly injured by the rocks.

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*During our mission, the children were the most aggressive individuals and the hardest to control.*

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## What We Can Do Better

In our post-mission review, we discussed several lessons learned. One was that small decisions, like parking the vehicles close to a house, could be considered tactically sound but could alienate the population if females were present in the yard. We also realized that giving water bottles to the children led to fights over these prizes and to resentment of our forces by the children who did not receive any water. Additionally, we determined it was better to have the ANA distribute the humanitarian assistance because they were more familiar with the cultural nuances and potential cultural landmines. One successful aspect of the mission was that the Afghan commander expressed his readiness to go out on such missions in the future, after coming to appreciate that these missions are more likely to win over the Afghan population than are guns.

From our perspective as coalition forces, it is important to understand that the human factor in counterinsurgency is the principal element that dictates the course of events. Understanding culture and being flexible with the human terrain are the most important “weapons” that can guarantee long-term success in the modern battle space, which so often is where people are living.



*There are no roads in this sector of rural Afghanistan. Here, OMLT vehicles are passing through a dry river bed.*

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## Notes

- 1 David Petraeus, ISAF Commander, “COMISAF’s Counterinsurgency guidance,” 1 August 2010. Available at: <http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/world/2010/COMISAF-MEMO.pdf> (accessed April 12, 2012).
- 2 Robert Mockaitis, *Resolving Insurgencies*: <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/> (accessed Dec. 15, 2011).
- 3 US Air Force, *Afghanistan Handbook*, 2010.

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## Photos

All photos courtesy of the author.

# The Killing Technology Next Door: Can South Sudan Learn from the Assassination of Darfur's JEM Leader?

*Thon Agany Ayiei*

The deliberate killing on December 25, 2011, of the leader of Darfur's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Khalil Ibrahim, inspired mixed reporting at first. In their initial reports, the Sudanese government in Khartoum and the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), claimed that Khalil died due to the wounds he sustained during a clash between his forces and the SAF while fighting his way toward Kordofan to join the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North, which was already fighting the SAF in that area. JEM, however, disputed the SAF's account about how its leader died, saying that he was assassinated in a sophisticated airstrike of a type not previously seen in Sudan.

On Tuesday, the 28th of December, 2011, the defense minister of the Republic of Sudan, Abdul Rahim Mohamed, publicly announced that Khalil was killed in an air strike carried out by the SAF. The minister added that "the tracking of a phone call had enabled the army to pinpoint the location of Khalil and strike him." This account confirmed JEM's statement and disproved the SAF's initial account of how Khalil died. At the same time, the defense minister praised the work of Khartoum's intelligence services, claiming that the killing of Khalil represented the "climax of a great intelligence operation." He further asserted that "killing Khalil was tantamount to beheading the rebellion in Darfur." This statement suggests that Khalil's killing resulted from a military analysis of JEM's center of gravity. It is worth noting that to determine the center of gravity requires looking at the components of a particular force and determining its strongest component which, if eliminated, would result in the destruction of that force.



*Khalil Ibrahim, assassinated leader of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).*

After Khalil's targeted assassination, Khartoum vowed to destroy JEM forces before they reached their destination, which was thought to be Southern Kordofan. However, later reports from Khartoum confirmed that JEM forces had reached their destination, and that they were now at the border with South Sudan. So, did Khartoum miscalculate JEM's center of gravity? It would seem so.

The focus of this short article is not whether the killing of Khalil gave Khartoum an advantage in any way, or whether his demise is going to end JEM's armed struggle. Rather, the purpose is to draw attention to the sophisticated technological capability used in his assassination, and ask whether South Sudan, as a direct neighbor of Sudan, can learn anything from it, and to what extent such capabilities should cause South Sudan and Khartoum's other neighbors concern.

Sophisticated assassinations such as the one that eliminated Khalil—tracking targets by electronic devices and eliminating them by air without any error of any kind—have until now been carried out only by security and intelligence agencies of the most powerful and developed countries. This technology was used by the United States military to track down Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in the Tora Bora mountains of Afghanistan in 2001, forcing him and his fighters to stop

using electronic communications. Thus, for Khartoum to demonstrate such a capability poses a major question: Is anything, or anyone, within reach of Khartoum safe? What about targets of value to Khartoum in South Sudan?

Juba and Khartoum have been engaged in a security tug-of-war since the two countries separated in July 2011. The revelation of this new targeting capability could set in motion a regional arms race, in which not only those two countries but possibly others as well compete to field more weapons, larger armies, and gain superior military technology. Remote targeting is an escalation that could well force South Sudan to look for ways to counter it, because it poses a potential threat to South Sudan's national security.

Sudan, a state that is run by realists—elites who put national interest and security above anything else—recently openly complained that a visit by South Sudan's President, Salva Kiir, to Israel posed a national security threat to Sudan. This complaint serves as testimony that Khartoum is watching Juba's security and international moves very closely. Of course, Khartoum's warning to Juba about its relations with Jerusalem breaches international norms since South Sudan is an independent state and has every right to foster diplomatic relations with any country it chooses to in the international arena.



President Kiir, for his part, pointed out that Sudan has been South Sudan's "main challenge" since independence. Events such as Khartoum's confiscation of ships bearing oil from the South; the SAF's occupation of the disputed border town of Abyei; its ground attacks on the South Sudan town of Jau and air bombardment of other border towns; and Khartoum's support of militias in the South, all demonstrate that Khartoum has been not only a difficult, but also a dangerous neighbor.\*

Given Khartoum's vigilance about South Sudan's security and international arrangements, it would be short-sighted for Juba not to look just as closely into Khartoum's security affairs, and to be especially concerned about what the killing of Khalil reveals: Khartoum's adoption of and proven willingness to use a new military capability, one that has the potential to change the sub-regional security equation altogether.



*Khalil Ibrahim*

## Note

\* This article was submitted to CTX well before the most recent clashes between Sudan and South Sudan took place.—Ed.

## Photos

p. 16 image copyright Agence-France Presse

p. 17 image Courtesy Alriyadh

# Exploitable Vulnerabilities of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

*COL Sean Corrigan, USA*

The leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran has empowered Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), or *Pasdaran*, to such an extent that the IRGC has become the center of gravity not only for the security, but also for the economy of the regime. This power, enabled by a lack of credible political checks and balances or separation of powers, is a critical strength for the *Pasdaran* and the current regime. However, the IRGC has a number of exploitable vulnerabilities. While it self-promotes and is portrayed domestically as the ideologically pure guardian of the Iranian revolution and defender of Islam, the IRGC is neither omnipotent nor omnipresent. Rather, the *Pasdaran* and its vast network of alumni and advocates are subject to factionalism, internal strife, and incompetence. This article describes the impact of the IRGC on Iran's security and economy, assesses the organization's vulnerabilities, and offers options for exploiting these vulnerabilities.<sup>1</sup>

## Creation of the IRGC

As Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini consolidated power after deposing Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979, he balanced the counterrevolutionary threat he perceived from Iran's conventional military with the IRGC, a trusted parallel military structure beholden to him and loyal to his revolutionary principles. In order to maintain internal order and suppress dissent, Khomeini also formalized the multiple post-revolution militias by organizing them into the *Basij* (Mobilization of the Oppressed). Even though the IRGC is constitutionally directed to coordinate with Iran's conventional military forces, and is nominally subordinate to a joint headquarters that oversees the security services and law enforcement forces, the *Pasdaran* answers directly only to the republic's Supreme Leader, currently Ayatollah Ali al Khamenei. This direct access to the Supreme Leader, combined with his consistent and considerable support for the IRGC, makes the *Pasdaran* peerless among the military, intelligence, law enforcement, and security services in Iran. The placement of current and former *Pasdaran* and *Basij* commanders and officers throughout all of Iran's other security organs mitigates any internal resistance to the *Pasdaran's* independence and its unique access to Khamenei.

*The Pasdaran answers directly only to the republic's Supreme Leader. This direct access... makes the Pasdaran peerless among the military, intelligence, law enforcement, and security services in Iran.*

The *Artesh*, Iran's conventional military ground force, consists of approximately 220,000 troops, as compared with the IRGC's 125,000. The *Artesh* is more heavily armed, while the *Pasdaran* maintains primacy over, and responsibility for, Iran's most critical national security initiatives, including cyber warfare, the intermediate-range ballistic missile program, and maritime security in the Arabian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. In addition, the *Pasdaran* claims an expansive and growing role in domestic security, and is widely assumed to be intimately involved in Iran's nuclear program. As the entity responsible for Iran's ballistic missile program as well as its asymmetric warfare capabilities, the *Pasdaran* has the means to deliver critical or subcritical fissile-material payloads by traditional or unconventional means. The IRGC's responsibility for military and technological research and testing suggests its likely involvement in any possible current or future nuclear weapons development.

Since October 2007, the IRGC has also formally controlled the *Basij*, a geographically based reserve force of 90,000 which can mobilize up to one million personnel. Following anti-regime riots in 1994, the *Basij* has assumed a larger role in internal security, receiving training in riot control in order to quell student or opposition uprisings.<sup>2</sup> The *Basij* also provides the IRGC with a network of eyes and ears across Iran, and maintains a presence in all major universities.



## IRGC Military Doctrine

The IRGC's military doctrine emphasizes asymmetric or irregular warfare as a means to counter a perceived technological capability and capacity gap in the event of conventional conflict on Iranian soil with other states. In August 2005, when he was the commander of the IRGC Center for Strategy, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari stated, "As the enemy is far more advanced technologically than we are, we have been using what is called asymmetric warfare methods. ...Our forces are now well prepared for it."<sup>3</sup> The driving principle of the IRGC's military doctrine is to undermine a

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*The driving principle of the IRGC's military doctrine is to undermine a stronger adversary's will to continue fighting, rather than defeat enemy military forces in conventional terms.*

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stronger adversary's will to continue fighting, rather than defeat enemy military forces in conventional terms. The tenets of this doctrine include, but are not limited to, the following: decentralized command and control of dispersed forces to mitigate an enemy's superior airpower and dominance of the electro-magnetic spectrum; incorporation of unconventional and terrorist tactics in response options; concentration of capabilities against an enemy's strategic weak points, which are not necessarily military in nature; offensive retaliatory strikes against the enemy outside the war zone; undermining the enemy's

national popular support through information warfare; and an emphasis on the power of religious zeal and martyrdom to bring victory.<sup>4</sup> The IRGC maintains the ability and capacity to take the conflict outside Iran's borders through unconventional tactics and asymmetric warfare. The *Pasdaran's Qods* (Jerusalem) Force is its primary tool in that endeavor.

## The Doctrine's Vulnerabilities

For all of its influence among the military organs of national power, the IRGC and its asymmetric warfare doctrine nevertheless present multiple vulnerabilities. The IRGC's blatant disregard for constitutionally mandated command and control structures, its independence from the Ministry of Defense, and its liberal interpretation of its authority put the *Pasdaran* on shaky legal ground. Iranian liberals and oppositionists make a strong argument that the IRGC has exceeded its authority to the point of acting as an extralegal paramilitary element. Mohsen Sazegara, one of the IRGC's founding members and now a political dissident, said of the *Pasdaran*, "I don't know of any other organization in any country like the Revolutionary Guards. It's something like the Communist Party, the KGB, a business complex, and the mafia."<sup>5</sup>

Parallel IRGC and conventional *Artesh* military structures create inefficiencies, violate unity of command, and promote factionalism. The *Pasdaran's* ascendance has come at the expense of both the *Artesh* and domestic law enforcement forces in terms of resources, authority, and political capital. The resulting friction among the security services has resulted in poor coordination, lack of integration, and a situation that is ultimately unsustainable.<sup>6</sup> The IRGC has long promoted itself as the Republic's savior, based on its performance in the Iran–Iraq war. This implies that the *Artesh* and the Iranian Navy failed the Republic, necessitating the *Pasdaran's* and *Basij's* heroic sacrifices and martyrdom in order to preserve the revolution. An alternative viewpoint is that the IRGC inserted itself into the forefront of that war precisely to secure its enduring prominence after the conflict. Additionally, military analysts both inside and outside Iran contend that the IRGC's human-wave tactics unnecessarily prolonged the conflict at an exorbitant cost in blood and treasure.<sup>7</sup> The *Pasdaran's* revisionist historical portrayal of its role in the Iran–Iraq war is vulnerable to the available facts concerning its actual performance and motives. Many military personnel and civilians still remember the *Pasdaran's* performance in that war differently, and if this truth were brought to light, it would severely undermine the IRGC's claimed historical justification for its current prominence.

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*For all of its influence among the military organs of national power, the IRGC and its asymmetric warfare doctrine nevertheless have multiple vulnerabilities.*

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The asymmetric warfare doctrine developed by Hassan Abbassi and Major General Jafari, and now being implemented by the *Pasdaran*, suggests further potentially useful points of vulnerability. The acknowledged promotion of terrorism as a pillar of the strategy constitutes an explicit violation of the Law of Armed Conflict by any interpretation of international

law. This violation effectively isolates Iran from any external state support in the event of conflict, or limits its supporters to a very small community of like-minded states and state-sponsored terrorist groups. Though willing and grateful to accept Iranian state support today, its surrogates and proxies act in their own interests, and it is not certain they can be relied on in the context of a larger conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Another point of potential vulnerability lies in the recruiting and manning of the *Basij* militia units, whose rank and file are subject to varying degrees of tribal, sect, and local loyalties. During the 1994 Qazvin riots, local IRGC and *Basij* units acted independently and demonstrated their conflicting loyalties by refusing to fire on unarmed protestors. This insubordination required the IRGC to import *Basij* units from other provinces to quell the riots.<sup>9</sup> An undetermined but significant percentage of the *Basij* rank and file join purely for the economic, educational, and social benefits rather than commitment to the regime's ideology or belief in the virtue of martyrdom.<sup>10</sup> It may be possible to drive a wedge between the *Basij* and the IRGC by illuminating the fact that the purported glory of martyrdom applies mostly to the *Basij* rank and file and not the powerbrokers among the IRGC.

## Role of the IRGC in Suppressing Internal Dissent

The IRGC (and *Basij*'s) role in crushing opposition inside Iran, in accordance with General Jafari's intention to prevent an Iranian "Velvet Revolution," offers possibly the *Pasdaran*'s greatest vulnerability. The protests that followed the June 2009 presidential election continued into December, and exposed divisions within the IRGC. Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Mahdi, a 30-year veteran of the *Pasdaran* and formerly head of IRGC investigations into threats against the regime, is now working as a political dissident and activist outside of Iran. In a 2010 interview with the *Guardian* news organization, he claimed that more than one third of the *Pasdaran* are now against the regime.

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*The protests that followed the June 2009 presidential election continued into December, and exposed divisions within the IRGC.*

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The current members of the Revolutionary Guard are saying that they have become very disheartened. The situation is becoming unbearable. ...The regime is witnessing its destruction. The regime is prepared to instill fear and insecurity into the people within Iran in order to ensure its stability. It has got to that stage. The regime is sinking.<sup>11</sup>

Mohammad Hussein Torkaman was the *Basij* officer responsible for security logistics for Iran's Supreme Leader and president during the June 2009 elections and the protests that followed. After witnessing the IRGC's methods of crushing the dissenters, he also defected. In that same *Guardian* interview, Torkaman stated:

After the 2009 election, supreme Leader and President brought in foreign mercenaries to protect them because they were uncertain of their own security forces. ...The forces they had chosen to do the shooting at people were from the *Qods* Force. The majority of them are Lebanese or Palestinian. They don't speak Farsi, the Persian language. These were the ones who were given permission to open fire. ...They had built places within the prisons, specifically for torturing people. There's a basement in Evin prison... it was extremely bad. Disease was spreading because of the prisoners' open wounds, which had been caused by torture.<sup>12</sup>

Though the *Pasdaran* outwardly presents an image of a tightly knit and cohesive force that is ideologically, theologically, and politically homogeneous, its role in quelling domestic revolts and crushing opposition movements has divided the ranks, contradicting this monolithic image. IRGC members' conflicting loyalties and doubts over the *Pasdaran*'s commitment to its original intended purpose present real vulnerabilities for the Iranian regime's primary military instrument of power.

## International Opposition

The IRGC's strategy of asymmetric warfare and its open advocacy of terrorism as a pillar of this strategy also have cost Iran in the international political sphere. The U.S. Department of State, in its 2010 annual country reports on terrorism, again designated Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism, as it has done since 1984. The designation triggers mandatory sanctions on economic assistance, the export of dual-use items, and arms sales to Iran.<sup>13</sup> While the designation has no binding effect on governments or private entities outside the United States, it is a powerful tool for isolating a country politically and economically. European Union and U.S. Treasury Department sanctions against IRGC leaders Jafari and Soleimani for their material support of Syria's violent actions against protestors amplify the message that there is a political and economic price to pay for the IRGC's strategy.<sup>14</sup> This offers yet another exploitable point of vulnerability: The *Pasdaran's* military strategy has a direct and negative impact on Iran's ability to fully use its political and economic tools.

## The IRGC's Economic Empire

The IRGC's expansion beyond the roles and tasks traditionally associated with a military or security service is most visible in its dominant role in Iran's economy. Leveraging its self-proclaimed popularity and influence after the Iran–Iraq war, the *Pasdaran* initially entered the economic realm under the auspices of guiding the country's reconstruction efforts. Since then, it has steadily expanded its economic influence with the support and approval of the Supreme Leader. The IRGC's influence spans virtually all sectors of the economy. *Khatam ol-Anbia*, Persian for "Seal of the Prophet," is the largest contracting business within a vast network owned and/or controlled by the IRGC. The

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*Alongside its legitimate enterprises, the IRGC, through its ownership of ports, its influence over airlines, and its status of near-impunity among Iran's law enforcement services, has both means and opportunities to play a dominant role in Iran's black- and gray-market economies as well.*

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IRGC owns and operates multiple port facilities and maintains its own banking system. In addition, in September 2009, the IRGC purchased a 50-percent controlling interest in Iran Telecommunications Company.<sup>15</sup> The IRGC's greatest economic instrument by far, however, is its influence over the energy sector, which accounts for more than 80 percent of the regime's revenue.<sup>16</sup> From 2005 to 2010, the IRGC and its affiliates won 750 oil, gas, and construction contracts.<sup>17</sup>

Alongside its legitimate enterprises, the IRGC, through its ownership of ports, its influence over airlines, and its status of near-impunity among Iran's law enforcement services, has both means and opportunities to play a dominant role in Iran's black- and gray-market economies as well. There are multiple motives for this involvement: personal profit for senior officers; funding and acquisition of weapon systems subject to international sanctions; bribery of political and clerical officials in order to maintain and increase the IRGC's economic and political position; support for covert initiatives abroad and the IRGC's nuclear research program; provision of financial support to IRGC veterans and their families; and expansion of the *Basij* through financial incentives.<sup>18</sup>

## Economic Policies Spur Antagonism

By militarizing such a significant portion of Iran's national economy, the IRGC has made itself politically vulnerable in a number of ways. In particular, the *Pasdaran's* extra-legal economic activity has not gone unnoticed by Iran's elected parliamentarians. In reference to the IRGC's black- and gray-market activities, *Majlis* (Parliament) member Ali Ghanbari openly criticized the *Pasdaran*,

Unfortunately, one third of the imported goods are delivered through the black market, underground economy, and illegal jetties. Appointed institutions [by Supreme Leader Khamenei] that don't obey the [rules of] the government and have control over the means of power [violence], institutions that are mainly military, are responsible [for those illegal activities].<sup>19</sup>

Former *Majlis* speaker and reformist cleric Mehdi Karrubi accused the IRGC of running 60 jetties without proper governmental supervision. Another member of Parliament quantified his estimate of the IRGC's illicit economic activity thus: "invisible jetties... and the invisible hand of the mafia control 68 percent of Iran's entire exports."<sup>20</sup> An outspoken critic of the regime and the *Pasdaran*, and previously a reformist candidate for the presidency, Mehdi Karrubi has remained under house arrest since February 2011.

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*Corruption and personal enrichment invite contempt and competition among senior IRGC officers, and create a potential wedge between the leadership and the rank and file of the organization.*

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Corruption and personal enrichment invite contempt and competition among senior IRGC officers, and potentially create a wedge between the leadership and the rank and file of the organization. The slow deterioration of Iran's once influential bazaar-merchant middle class, through the IRGC's control of the underground economy and its militarization of the private sector, has also alienated a large segment of the population accustomed to a tradition of relatively free enterprise. In a formal letter to the government, 29 private businessmen openly questioned the constitutionality as well as the effectiveness of the IRGC's economic activities:

Responsibilities [of the military and civilian institutions] are well defined in the Constitution. [Moreover] the goal of the "Next 20 Years' Economic Projection," is to make the government smaller. [We ask the question] whether it makes sense economically and technically, to award [all the] large scale projects to the military or paramilitary organizations?<sup>21</sup>

## Ways to Exploit IRGC Vulnerabilities

There are a number of ways in which the United States and its allies might exploit the IRGC's vulnerabilities. Foremost, the allies should maintain technical and physical superiority in the region, providing a credible deterrent to both the IRGC threat of asymmetric warfare and terrorism, and malevolent activities in neighboring nations. Through theater security cooperation in multiple geographic combatant commands, the U.S. Departments of Defense, State, Justice, and the Treasury should also continue to support improvements in counterterrorism capability and capacity among allied nations, in order to deter the *Pasdaran's* implementation of terrorism as a military tactic. Within the U.S. Central Command area of responsibility, specifically the nations bordering the Arabian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, military sales, training, exercises, and intelligence sharing should all be coordinated to counter the IRGC's asymmetric warfare doctrine and its naval swarm tactics. Washington could also make a case for designating the entire *Pasdaran* and *Basij* as terrorist organizations due to their known sponsorship and training of terrorists, leaving them exempt from the protections normally afforded uniformed armed forces under the Geneva Conventions and the Laws of Armed Conflict.

Additionally, the U.S. military should consider developing a campaign plan based on segregating and isolating the IRGC and *Basij* from the more conventional *Artesh*, and driving a wedge between the elite *Pasdaran* leadership and the rank and file who were expected to martyr themselves on the IRGC's behalf. The *Artesh* should be assured of its place as an element of the armed services in a future sovereign Iran that is free from the *Pasdaran* and its leaders. The United States can also communicate directly to the *Basij* that mass attrition of its rank and file during missions might benefit the IRGC, but not the Iranian people or anyone else.

The United States and its allies should also consider improving the capability and capacity of their military information support operations, tailoring them to quickly achieve and maintain information superiority just as militaries would normally strive to achieve air superiority against a traditional adversary. The tools and skills required in the Iranian case, however, are not necessarily the same as those used in Iraq and Afghanistan and cannot be rapidly produced. Early investment in Farsi language training, along with a solid understanding of Persian history and culture, are vital for effective planning and engagement.



The extent and corruption of the IRGC economic enterprise must be laid bare to both the Iranian people and the rest of the world. Information and intelligence sharing among allies can provide the transparency that the IRGC has avoided through its use and abuse of foundations, cooperatives, front companies, and the black market. Iran's private business sector and bazaar middle class should be given the information they need to fully grasp the unfair business practices the *Pasdaran* enterprise exploits to enrich its elite and finance its consolidation of power.

Economic sanctions should extend to all *bonyads* (charitable trusts), banks, and cooperatives associated with this vast network. Although current sanctions are having some effect, they cannot prevent the *Pasdaran* from generating and laundering the revenue required to maintain and expand its domestic and international influence unless regional and international players such as the European Union, MERCOSUR, the African Union, ASEAN, and the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as member nations of the World Trade Organization, agree to honor sanctions against the entirety of the *Pasdaran's* economic enterprise. The development of alternative markets and sources of oil and gas for countries dependent on Iranian imports, coupled with these kinds of broader sanctions, could have a profound effect on the *Pasdaran's* military and economic power.

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## Notes

- 1 The views presented in this article are those of the author alone, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Defense or its components.
- 2 "Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: The Gulf States, Iran," (August 5, 2011), retrieved from *IHS Jane's Defence & Security Intelligence & Analysis* website: [http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS\\_doc\\_view.jsp?Sent\\_Country=Iran&Prod\\_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/irans010.htm@current](http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/sentinel/GULFS_doc_view.jsp?Sent_Country=Iran&Prod_Name=GULFS&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/gulfsu/irans010.htm@current), (accessed September 12, 2011).
- 3 Jahangir Arasli, "Obsolete Weapons, Unconventional Tactics, and Martyrdom Zeal: How Iran Would Apply its Asymmetric Naval Warfare doctrine in a Future Conflict," *George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies Occasional Paper Series*, no. 10 (April 2007): 11–12.
- 4 Ibid., 12–13. The concept of martyrdom for the sake of Islam as a religious duty is an integral part of the IRGC indoctrination program, with roots in Shia theology and Iranian culture. Military success depends more on the human factor and adherence to the Iranian revolutionary brand of Islamic faith and ideology than technology, training, and skills of the soldiers.
- 5 Frederick Wehrey, *Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2009), 2.
- 6 "Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment."
- 7 Michael Eisenstadt, *The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran Operational and Policy Implications*, Middle East Studies at the Marine Corps University, MES Monographs, no. 1 (August 2011): 7.
- 8 Mustafa Al-Sawwaf, "Iran Failed to 'Blackmail' HAMAS, 'Buy Political Positions' for Aid," from the Gaza Filastin (electronic edition) in Arabic, (September 8, 2011), retrieved from [https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS\\_0\\_0\\_200\\_307\\_521\\_43/content/Display/GMP20110908751001](https://www.opensource.gov/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_0_0_200_307_521_43/content/Display/GMP20110908751001), (accessed September 9, 2011).
- 9 Wehrey, *Rise of the Pasdaran*, 83.
- 10 Eisenstadt, *Strategic Culture*, 11.
- 11 Angus Stickler and Maggie O'Kane, "Former Elite Officers Reveal Tensions in Iran Regime," Guardian Films, Bureau of Investigative Journalism videofile, (June 11, 2010), retrieved from *The Guardian* website: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/11/iran-revolutionary-guards-regime>, (accessed September 15, 2011).
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, August 18, 2011, chapters 3 and 6: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2010/170260.htm> (accessed August 24, 2011).

- 14 “European Union Council Implementing Regulation (EU) No 611/2011 of 23 June 2011, implementing Regulation (EU) No 442/2011 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria,” retrieved from *Eur-Lex: Access to European Law* website: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:164:0001:0003:EN:PDF>, (accessed August 30, 2011); “Administration Takes Additional Steps to Hold the Government of Syria Accountable for Violent Repression Against the Syrian People,” (May 18, 2011), retrieved from *U.S. Department of Treasury Press Center* website: <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1181.aspx> (accessed August 30, 2011).
- 15 Kenneth Katzman, “Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses,” (Washington, DC: U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, April 18, 2011), 24.
- 16 “Country Report, Iran,” *Economist Intelligence Unit* (London, August 2011): 3.
- 17 Ali Alfoneh, “The Revolutionary Guards Looting of Iran’s Economy,” *American Enterprise Institute Middle East Outlook*, no. 3, (June, 2010): <http://www.aei.org/outlook/100969>, (accessed September 16, 2011).
- 18 Wehrey, *Rise of the Pasdaran*, 65–66.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, 73–74.



Tehran, Milad Tower at Night—image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

# State of the Art

## From yBa to Al Qaeda: A Spectrum of Postmodern Spectacular

*Rachel Davis*

On the eve of September 11th's first anniversary, Damien Hirst, the acclaimed and highly successful golden boy of the art establishment's yBa (young British artists) "high art lite" collective, made the following remark: "The thing about 9/11 is that it's kind of an artwork in its own right. It was wicked, but it was devised in this way for this kind of impact. It was devised visually. You've got to hand it to them on some level because they've achieved something which nobody would have ever thought possible, especially to a country as big as America. So on one level they kind of need congratulating, which a lot of people shy away from, which is a very dangerous thing."<sup>1</sup>

Though this statement was found to be in poor taste by the international community at the time, and was retracted by the artist a few days later, it still provokes the question: How could Damien Hirst, an artist whose work is reviewed by the world's most prominent art critics and whose pieces are purchased by the world's wealthiest individuals, applaud such a depraved act, even in those careful terms? As an artist, how could he call it art? Who are the sickos here, the terrorists, Hirst... or both? And if Hirst is a moral degenerate, what does that say about all those members of society who applaud him?

Two answers stand out. First, is the East/West polarization: Al Qaeda stands for completely foreign, depraved, and purely evil values, whereas Hirst, depraved as he might appear, is no more than a hapless and relatively benign product of the bizarre art world, Western wealth, decadence, and over-education. The contrast between his sophistication and the ignorant, fanatical, and primitive mindset of the 9/11 terrorists could not be more stark.

The more cynical answer: Al Qaeda represents the vanguard of global resentment of

American hegemony, as does Hirst; Hirst just represents a milder, meeker version. Instead of launching an outright assault on globalized, Western capitalism, Hirst manipulates the market to his own ends, while at once sharing and mocking the snobbery of the ultra-rich. In this view, both Hirst and bin Laden are akin to the legendary American gangsters Bonnie and Clyde: two outlaws taking potshots at a complacent, domineering society.

There is a third possibility. Begin by considering that Damien Hirst and the creators of al Qaeda are distinctly different in their historical origins. At the same time, they are similarly influenced by post-colonialism, late-capitalism, and globalization. For modern Islamist thinkers like Sayyid Qutb, who directly influenced bin Laden, simultaneous resentment and indebtedness toward modernity fed nostalgia for a glorious, imaginary past. Hirst deals with the reality of a globalized yet fragmented world through



*Damien Hirst: "The Crow" Oil on canvas, 2009*

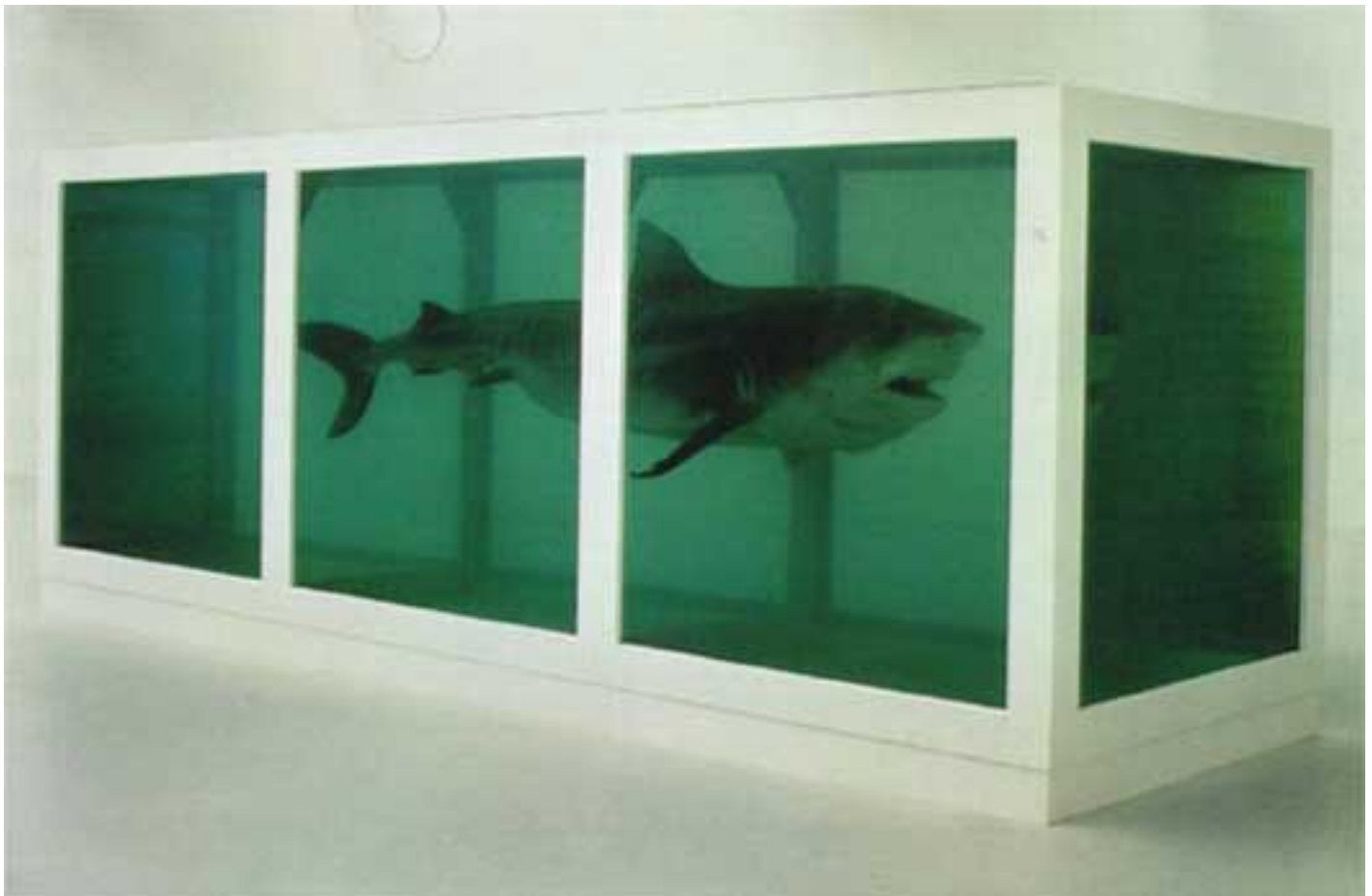
visual expressions of alienation. At a glance, Damien Hirst may seem a world removed from Osama bin Laden, but their use of violent aesthetics is strikingly similar. YBa and al Qaeda are two sides of the same post-modern coin, a revelation that sheds new light on Hirst's post-9/11 comments, and possibly offers insights into terrorists' motivations—and our own.

The terrifying nature of the choreographed 9/11 attacks should have been eerily familiar to any Westerner. If conspiracy films predominated in 1970s American culture, disaster films defined the 90s: *Deep Impact*, *Armageddon*, *Independence Day*, *Mars Attacks*, and *Volcano* come to mind. This blurred divide between the real and the imagined was demonstrated by President George W. Bush when, shortly after 9/11, he invited Spike Jonze (director of the cult film *Being John Malkovich*) and Steven De Souza (screenwriter of the first two *Die Hard* movies), both members of the Institute for Creative Technologies, to a conference held jointly by the U.S. Army and the University of Southern California. The aim of the meeting, according to art critic Terry Smith, was to “brainstorm about terrorist targets and schemes in America and offer

solutions to those threats.”<sup>2</sup> He noted, “The handcuff between the virtual and the real that is so typical of the times was confirmed by this aspect of 9.11.01: newspaper reports frequently cited viewers, seeing television images of the planes hitting the towers for the first time, claiming that they assumed that some kind of action movie was playing... For many, perhaps all of us, 9.11.01 remains, in varying degrees, phantasmic.”<sup>3</sup>

Al Qaeda's fluency with media is no accident. As Marshall McLuhan once wrote, “We shape our tools and thereafter they shape us.”<sup>4</sup> Al Qaeda's name for itself, translated as “the base, foundation, or database,”<sup>5</sup> is modeled on the ultimate symbol of contemporary society, the World Wide Web. As a medium, the Web, even more than television, enables a highly visual, mass-oriented, and anti-authoritative atmosphere. Coupled with an ideology that despises Western, and especially American, values, its inherently fluid, deliberately anarchic structure can be put to deadly use.

Call September 11th telematic communication and it perfectly fits critic Roy Ascott's description of telematic art: “To engage in telematic communication is to be at



Damien Hirst: “The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living” Mixed media, 1991



once everywhere and nowhere. In this it is subversive... . It replaces the bricks and mortar of institutions of culture and learning with an invisible college and a floating museum the reach of which is always expanding to include the possibilities of mind and new intimations of reality.”<sup>6</sup> Lest we grant al Qaeda too much credit, the group was using the same two powerful platforms for global societal subversion—the computer/web and television—that the art world had begun to explore long before. Ideas that first germinated in high art had already suffused pop culture. Just think *The Matrix*.

Nam Jun Paik, often described as the world’s first video artist, wrote in 1984, “I see video not as a dictatorial medium, but as a liberating one. That’s what this [video art] show is about, to be a symbol for how satellite television can cross international borders and bridge enormous cultural gaps.”<sup>7</sup> Paik’s revolutionary, anti-establishment perspective, in contrast to that of yBa, favored an ephemeral, collective voice channeled through the incantations of a self-effacing, as opposed to self-proclaiming, individual. Ironically, al Qaeda saw the same potential in the Internet medium that Paik did. It wielded its power in the way that Paik suggested, and justified its actions with similar words. As one observer noted:

Before satellite TV, phones and the internet, bin Laden might have been nothing more than a Messianic mahdi for a thousand tribesmen. But modern communications technology has allowed exiled radicals to broadcast their views to target populations free from state interference or retribution. Bin Laden’s gripping and powerful pre-recorded video clip, delivered before the US air raids on Afghanistan and shown by al-Jazeera within hours of their inception, epitomized the inadequacy of the response the most powerful state in the world could muster in the face of basic modern telecommunications used well.<sup>8</sup>

Americans were subjected to watching their own icons warped before their eyes, in an invasion that penetrated not only the skies of New York City, but the privacy of the American living room—and the effect felt like an invasion of the American soul.

When President Bush called the actions the United States engaged in after 9/11 a “War on Terrorism,” he essentially launched us on a fight against a tactic. *Can war be waged on a tactic? Is that any easier, or more worthwhile, than waging war on an idea? Are the two really all that different? People have been debating the answers to these*

questions for the past ten years. We agree, meanwhile, that ideas are shaped by the packages they come in, wouldn’t it also make sense to look at the technology medium that has been used to promote the tactic of terrorism, and the studied selection of targets that, like the media and subjects of art, strike at our emotions?

This brings us back to “high art.” When astoundingly successful artists like Damien Hirst talk about what they consider “sublime,” here’s why we might want to pay more attention. Not only has Hirst’s own work treated death both digitally and in 3D, but he and other artists of his generation remain obsessed with spectacle and upheaval in Western culture. It is as if, instinctively, artists of Hirst’s generation have homed in on the Achilles’ heel of the Western world. How ironic that the subversion they want to embrace is wrought in the real world by real terrorists whose acts the artists’ adoring audiences abhor. If we can grasp how the work of artists like Damien Hirst gains such prominence in our society, we may be able to fathom how the al Qaeda terrorists conceived their act and so effectively shattered our self-image on September 11, 2001.

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## Notes

- 1 Rebecca Allison, “9/11 Wicked but a Work of Art Says Damien Hirst,” *The Guardian*, September 10, 2002 (accessed October 1, 2011): <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2002/sep/11/arts.september11>.
- 2 Terry Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 111.
- 3 Ibid., 112.
- 4 Margot Lovejoy, *Digital Currents* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 221.
- 5 “Al-Qaeda’s Origins and Links,” *BBC News*, updated July 20, 2004: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1670089.stm>
- 6 Lovejoy, *Digital Currents*, 220.
- 7 Roy Ascott, *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness* (London: University of California Press, 2003), 80.
- 8 Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (New York: I.B Taurus, 2003), 39.

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## Photos

<http://www.wikipaintings.org/en/damien-hirst/the-crow>  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hirst-Shark.jpg>

# The Written Word

## *Lions of Kandahar: The Story of a Fight Against All Odds*

*Reviewed by LTC Jan Novak, ACR*

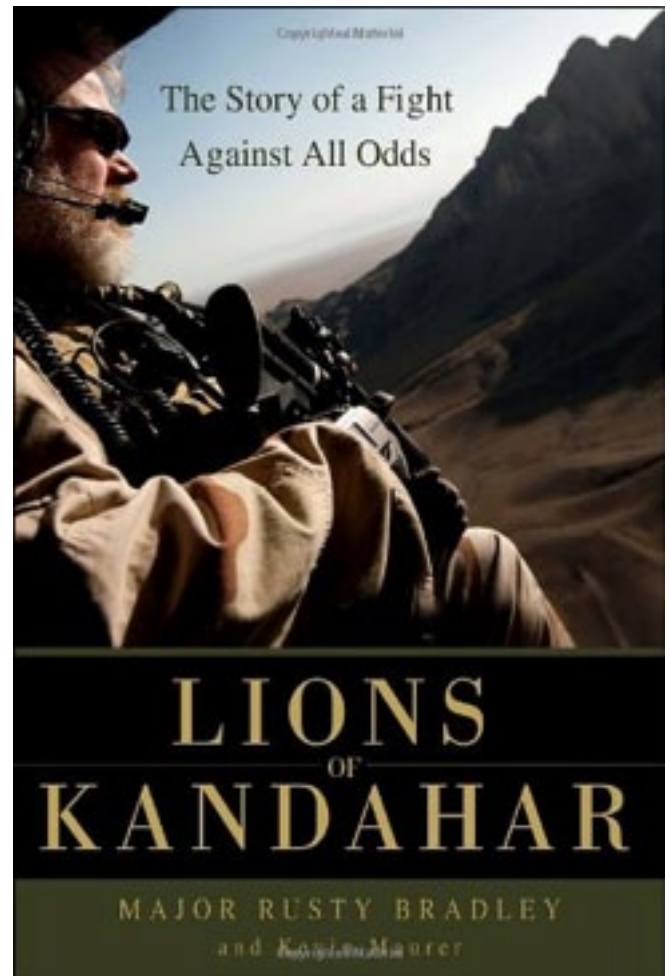
Rusty Bradley and Kevin Maurer (2011)  
New York: Random House  
ISBN-10: 0553807579  
Hardcover: \$26.00 USD  
304 pages

If you are looking for deep background information on the Afghan War, see my recommendations at the end of this review. If you are looking for a description of intense combat viewed through the eyes of a Special Forces captain—carry on.

The first rounds slammed into the windshield like a jackhammer. I winced, expecting the worst. Luckily, the bullet-resistant glass did its job; otherwise my brains would have been blown all over the truck. Rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) shot by just feet away, so close I could see the spring-loaded stabilizer fins that can easily shear off men's heads, arms, legs, and destroy a small vehicle with appalling quickness. We had just arrived at the battlefield.

Author Rusty Bradley is a former noncommissioned officer who, after earning his commission through Officer Candidate School, passed Special Forces selection and then successfully negotiated the SF Qualification course. In *Lions of Kandahar: The Story of a Fight Against All Odds*, Bradley describes events that happened during his third tour in Afghanistan in 2006. He and his Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 331 were dismayed to find the situation in-country much worse than when they had left eight months earlier.

The Canadian general in command of NATO coalition troops in southern Afghanistan, hoping to capitalize on recent successes, planned a major offensive operation that included Bradley's unit. The event, which had the name Operation Medusa, became the largest NATO-led offensive in Afghanistan. As happens so often in war,



however, things did not go as planned. When enemy forces prevented two Canadian mechanized battle groups from advancing, the three American ODAs assigned a role in support of the leading Canadian units found themselves spearheading the the main effort of the operation. This book tells the story of how three dozen operators, assigned to take a single hill, gradually changed the dynamics of a major battle, and in coordination with coalition air assets, prevented likely failure. Over a few days of intense combat with hundreds of enemy reported killed, coalition forces retook control of the Taliban's stronghold in southern Afghanistan. Bradley also makes clear, however, that this operation became necessary only because vague coalition strategy and goals over the years following the initial invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 allowed the Talibs to regain strength in areas historically and strategically important to them.

Among the many books about current events in Afghanistan, this one stands out due to the author's vivid

description of the battle itself. Bradley's writing style is fast-paced and engaging from the opening pages all the way to the end, and he draws the reader quickly into both book and battle. Unfortunately, this intensely personal style, in which the world seems to revolve around the author, also constitutes the book's major flaw. At the end, many readers find themselves confused by the fact that the detailed account focuses almost entirely on Bradley's experiences, while mostly omitting the contributions of the other ODAs, not to mention the Canadian forces. Even given the fact that *Lions of Kandahar* is Major Bradley's personal memoir, he would be a more effective narrator if he were less narrowly focused. The other actors deserve more attention. The book would then have provided a more comprehensible and well-rounded picture of events.

After all, the ODA is sometimes called the "A-Team," and the battle was a team effort, not a one-man show.

If you are looking for a fast-paced, gripping narrative about combat action down to the team and individual level, I recommend *The Lions of Kandahar*. If you want a book with more historical depth and high-quality background information, consider reading Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004; 720 pages); Gary Berntsen and Ralph Pezzullo's *Jawbreaker* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005; 352 pages); or Sean Naylor's *Not a Good Day to Die* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005; 320 pages).

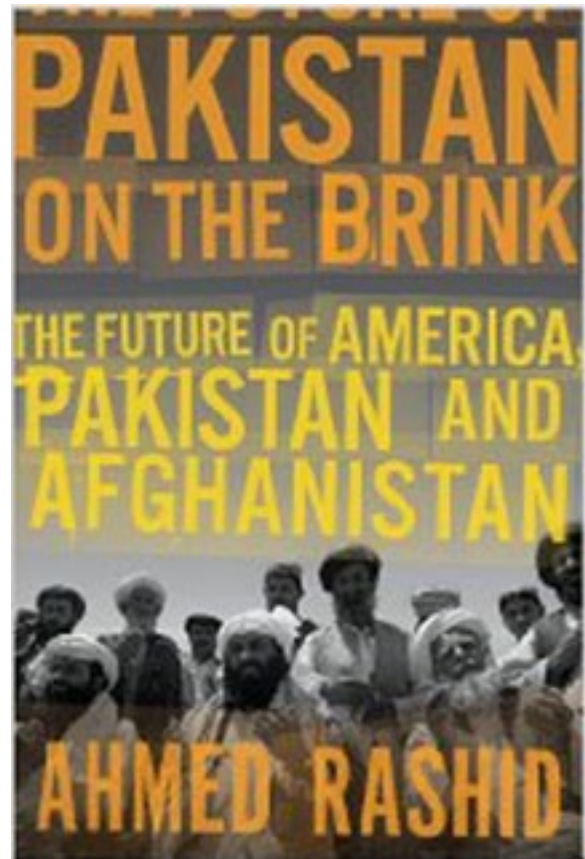
A version of this review appeared in the journal *On War/On Peace* (in Czech): <http://www.onwar.eu/>

# Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan

*Reviewed by MAJ Marcus Forman, USA*

Ahmed Rashid (2012)  
New York: Viking Press  
ISBN-10: 0670023469  
Hardcover \$26.95 USD  
256 pages

For nearly 11 years, the efficacy and influence of American foreign policy in Pakistan has risen and fallen with the tidal shifts of regional politics. Now, after more than a decade, the ship of American military and political expectations may have finally run aground on the cragged shoreline of reality in Pakistan. In his new book, *Pakistan on the Brink: The Future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan*, senior journalist Ahmed Rashid deftly navigates these waters in a way that is not only articulate and accessible, but even courageous thanks to his insistence on shining a



bright light on the motives and failings of his country's political and military leaders.

Admitting that he has become decidedly more pessimistic in recent years, here Rashid follows his best-selling 2008 work, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Penguin; 560 pages) with a blend of primary source interviews and insightful analysis that is both credible and even-handed. As a former guerilla from Baluchistan and now

an expert on the region, Rashid begins by recounting his conversations in 2008 with President-elect Barack Obama, and his concern that although Obama had great respect for the scope and scale of the issues in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the president-elect was not well informed. This deficiency, combined with Afghan President Hamid Karzai's pervasive crises of confidence and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari's tumultuous political ascension, serves, in Rashid's account, as the starting point for Pakistan's accelerating slide toward the cliff's edge of instability.

Rashid does not hesitate to recommend ways to advance and improve Pakistan's relationships with both its proximate neighbors and members of the international community that have a vested interest in the stability of a nuclear-armed nation with geostrategic importance. The United States, he insists, must develop a strategy that looks far past the current 2014 horizon, when U.S. troops are scheduled to withdraw from Afghanistan. Rashid believes that, "A positive outcome for the region will depend on a deliberate, carefully considered Western withdrawal from Afghanistan, the existence of a political settlement with the Taliban, and Pakistan's willingness to

rein in Islamic extremism and prevent a potential state meltdown."

He warns, however, that any willingness to rein in domestic extremism is too often subsumed by Pakistan's historical obsession with what it perceives to be India's drive for regional hegemony, a myopia that also allows Pakistan's leadership to ignore the potential dangers that underrepresented border tribes pose for national political decision making. Further, Rashid cautions that the "schizophrenia" of Pakistan's Afghanistan strategy, attempting to play all sides in the conflict against one another, may become a self-inflicted wound that bleeds away the credible and well-reasoned foreign policy the country so desperately needs to survive.

From an operator's perspective, Rashid provides the type of perceptive detail and insight that is critical to understanding the most prevalent issues for American foreign policy, at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. *Pakistan on the Brink* offers more than just a primer on the complex and dynamic elements of the region, and will benefit anyone who might seek to influence them.

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# The Moving Image

## Before Iraq & Afghanistan, There Was Ireland

by Kaley I. Sepp

Modern insurgents rarely fight only one enemy for the territory they contest. Besides the counter-insurgents—be they state security forces, foreign occupation troops, or both—the insurgents often have to battle other insurgents, to settle whose political vision for their post-revolutionary government will prevail. These power struggles sometimes continue after the counter-insurgent is bested, and a new cycle of civil war ensues.

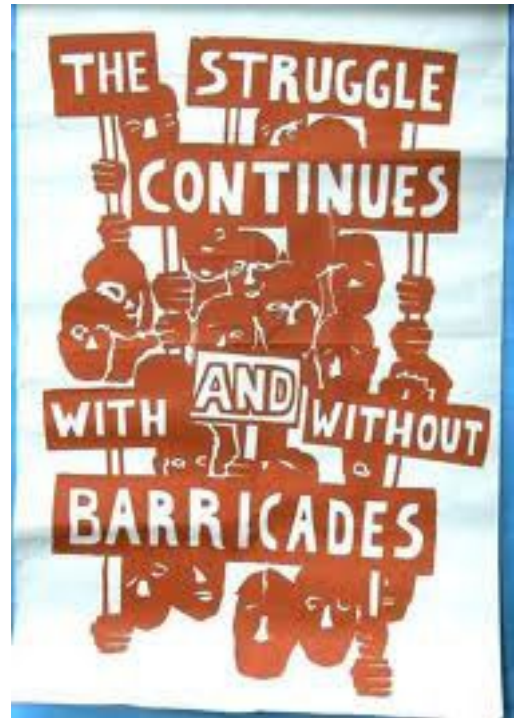
One of the most vicious sets of these compound civil wars took place in Ireland, from 1916 to 1923. The leaders of the Irish separatist movement, believing that the British home government and military would be unable to turn their attention from the Great War in France, mounted an insurrection in April of 1916, known as the Easter Rising. Unfortunately, the rebels overestimated the degree of public support they would inspire, and underestimated the sharpness of the British response. British intelligence had discovered the rebels were attempting to gain German military aid, and Whitehall reacted forcefully. The Rising was crushed in a week, resulting in the deaths of approximately 100 British troops and 300 Irish insurgents

and civilians, and the arrest of thousands of rebels and sympathizers.

Undeterred, many of the survivors of the Easter Rising, some while still in prison camps (“universities of revolution”), planned a more serious, better-organized rebellion.

Political mobilization of the Irish population gained widespread backing for the separatist Republicans. The exception was Ulster in northern Ireland, where Unionists held a majority. With strong popular support in the south, on January 21, 1919, the leaders of Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Army’s political wing, declared Ireland both independent and in a state of war with England.

The Irish War of Independence followed, characterized by urban and rural guerrilla warfare that pitted the insurgent IRA against the counter-insurgent Royal Irish Constabulary. The British augmented the beleaguered RIC with the infamous “Black and Tans” mercenaries, so called for their mixed uniforms of dark green or dark blue tunics and khaki trousers, which an Irish journalist likened to the piebald hides of local fox-hunting beagles. Assassinations and killings by both sides brought reprisals and property destruction—what young parliamentarian Winston Churchill called “murder and counter-murder.” The conflict stalemated, and the belligerent parties agreed to a truce on July 11, 1921. The subsequent Anglo-Irish Treaty of December/January 1922 formally ended the war, and set the political machinery in motion to create the Irish Free State. This outcome, however, was not what everyone hoped for, and the killing continued.



Claiming betrayal of their aim to free all of Ireland from British rule, in June 1922 the troops of the Anti-Treaty Irish Republican Army turned on their former comrades-in-arms in the Irish Free State's new National Army. The Republicans had already attacked Northern Ireland, which had opted out of independence. Paradoxically, the National Army joined the Anti-Treaty IRA for part of this northern campaign, which failed when the mounting civil war in the south of Ireland drew their forces away. After a year of bitter fighting, the National Army gained the upper hand. In 1923, the Anti-Treaty leader Éamon de Valera ordered his IRA troops to surrender, grudgingly conceding, "Military victory must be allowed to rest for the moment with those who have destroyed the Republic."

Ultimately, the one-year-long Irish Civil War was bloodier than the three years of the War of Independence. The violence continued for decades between republican Catholics and loyalist Protestants in Northern Ireland, which remained in the British Empire. Some 1,400 died in the war to win Irish self-rule—about 700 British troops and RIC police, and 700 (or more) rebels and civilians. Then, as many as 4,000 more Irish may have died fighting their fellow Irishmen. The exact number is not known. What is well-recalled is the viciousness of the Easter Rising, the Rebellion, and the Civil War, in the incongruous setting of one of the most beautiful countries on the planet, among a poetically literate and cultured people. Who else might claim this as the story of their nation, as well?

Four motion pictures give a sense of this complex and cruel series of internal conflicts, from 1916 to 1923:

**Michael Collins** (1996) engagingly follows one of the principal leaders of the Republicans (strongly played by Liam Neeson) from the 1916 Easter Rising to the end of the strife. Collins rises as a tough underground guerrilla chief to military commander of the nation he helped create. He then must fight the Anti-Treaty rebels led by his former political chief, Éamon de Valera (Alan Rickman is excellent in this role). There are some minor historical inaccuracies, but these don't detract from the larger story of how

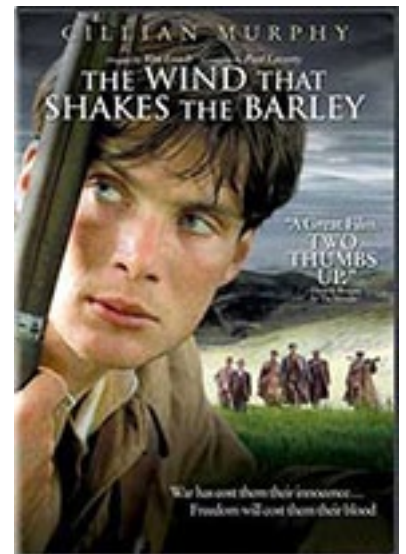


tectonic events can vault a man from gang boss learning to wage an insurgent war, to army commander trying to end an insurgent war. The film was awarded a Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

**The Informer** (1935) is a gritty, street-level view of a tough-but-flawed "foot soldier" in the Irish Republican Army in 1922 (played convincingly by Victor McLaglen). The intelligence section of the dreaded Black and Tans uses familiar methods to find and recruit an informer, and the rebels have to uncover the traitor in their midst. A highlight of the film is the underground court-martial of the suspect. The depiction of guerrilla justice, administered with cold-blooded directness, is a reminder of how strictly insurgent discipline must be enforced for the organization to survive. John Ford won the first of his four Best Director Oscars for *The Informer*, and the film won three more for Best Actor (McLaglen), Screenplay, and Music. Incidentally, at the 1935 Venice Film Festival, Ford was also nominated for the Mussolini Cup. He likely didn't miss having that trophy on his bookshelf. (There is a less-noted 1929 British-made motion picture, based on the same novel.)



**The Wind That Shakes the Barley** (2006) is on the one hand an attractive motion picture—shot on location in verdant County Cork, and with a lyrical title from a 19th century Irish ballad—but on the other hand it has the tinny drumbeat of political propaganda. The storyline runs from 1919 to 1923, and tells a metaphorical tale of two brothers who fight side-by-side during the War of Independence, then against each other in the Civil War. Despite this appealing plot, the more positive reviews called the movie's director Ken Loach "inflammatory," "brave," and "thought-provoking." Harsher critics wrote that Loach unevenly portrayed "the British as sadists and the Irish as romantic, idealistic resistance fighters"





(this from an Irish historian), and that the film was “a poisonously anti-British corruption of the history of the war” (so wrote a Scottish journalist). These deficiencies and others, including stagey political dialogues and tiresome readings of manifestos, make this movie unhelpful to students of these wars, either as documentary history, or as an insight into the successive conflicts. That said, it won the Palm d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival, as well as several Irish film awards, and did well at the box office in Ireland. At the least, it represents fine pro-IRA propaganda.

**Shake Hands with the Devil** (1959) is a well-done piece of historical fiction, which begins in 1921 Dublin, where the movie was filmed. At Trinity College, a prominent doctor (James Cagney at his professional best) is a medical school professor by day, and an insurgent unit commandant by night. The contradictory dilemmas of guerrilla warfare are presented one after another, from smuggling to hostage-taking to summary executions. When the news of the truce ending the War of Independence arrives, the commandant finds his unit divided between those relieved to see the fighting end, and the Anti-Treaty rebels who want to fight on. Actor Richard Harris has his first significant role in this movie, as a loose-lipped IRA gunman, short on smarts but long on mad courage. (Do not

confuse this movie with the 2007 film of the same name, about the Rwandan genocide.)

## Bonus Movie

Set in 1940s Belfast, where much of this film was shot, the acclaimed noir film **Odd Man Out** (1947) artfully depicts people unexpectedly entangled in political violence in

northern Ireland. Although the Irish Civil War finished the fighting in the south, “The Troubles” continued in the nine Unionist counties of Ulster province that chose to remain under British dominion. Strapped for cash for operations, the leader of an IRA-like gang (James Mason) decides to rob a mill, and then must evade police “in a bleak labyrinth of havens and traps.” In England, *Odd Man Out* was awarded “Best British Film,” and was nominated for both a Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival, and a Best Film Editing Oscar.



# Ethics and Insights

## Moral Courage: Take Two

George Lober

I recently received an email from a student in which he made the following observation: of the ten highest military service awards America bestows, the qualifying criteria for each involves either physical courage and bravery, or extended periods of service with extreme responsibility. Not one, my student observed, is for demonstrating moral courage.

Around this same time, I presented a case study to my class that involved a moderate to serious military indiscretion. A number of my students that day concluded that the best resolution to the dilemma was to keep the matter “in house” (i.e. within the organization), and not to go public with the indiscretion. They cited as reasons the potential damage to the reputation of the military in general, and to the specific branch in particular. When I raised the idea of a possible moral obligation to come forward publicly with the truth regardless of the embarrassment, one student remarked, “Sir, we are not a service of rats!” —in other words, not a service of squealers, stool pigeons, or leakers of secrets.

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*An act of moral courage... consists of three elements: a moral principle, a danger involved in acting upon the principle, and a willingness, despite clear recognition of the danger, to act upon that principle nonetheless.*

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government agencies, or in any national or international civic organization entrusted with public care, welfare, and protection? If rather than being admired, people who act with moral courage are often regarded as “rats” because they upset organizational complacency, does that raise a palpable disincentive to do the right thing?

Taken together, the two instances make me wonder: If moral courage isn’t recognized and highly rewarded, is there any real incentive to exercise it within the American military or any other military, in

The ethicist Rushworth Kidder, in his book *Moral Courage* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 2005) defines any act of moral courage as consisting of three elements: a moral principle, a danger involved in acting upon the principle, and a willingness, despite clear recognition of the danger, to act upon that principle nonetheless. For Kidder, if there is no moral principle at stake, it’s not an act of moral courage.

The dangers of acting upon that principle can run the gamut from social ostracism or loss of employment to blacklisting, or even threats to one’s health and safety. If one fully understands both the moral principle in play and the dangers involved, and if one chooses to act upon that principle anyway—recognizing that the dangers may well come to pass—Kidder regards that choice as an act of moral courage. Such an actor would hardly seem worthy of the label “rat.”

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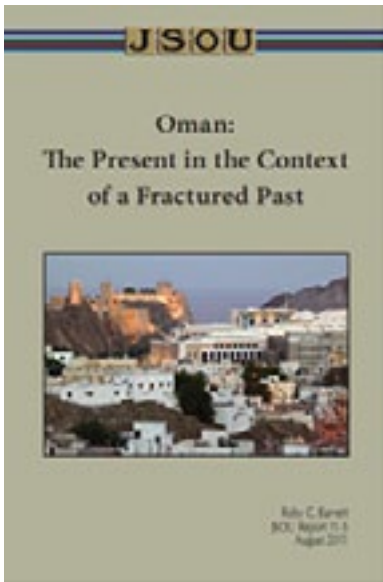
*Can we call people to task for a failure to act with moral courage in the face of organizational and social norms that discourage or even condemn such behavior?*

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Yet if, regardless of rank or position, people are not taught, trained, and rewarded for acting with moral courage, can society really expect them to demonstrate it anyway, particularly when the disincentives may be so strong? Can we call people to task for a failure to act with moral courage in the face of organizational and social norms that discourage or even condemn such behavior? Or to put it another way, if we want people to act with moral courage, do we first have an ethical obligation to teach and reward that behavior, even if on occasion the truth that’s revealed may hurt?



# Resources: Publication Announcements



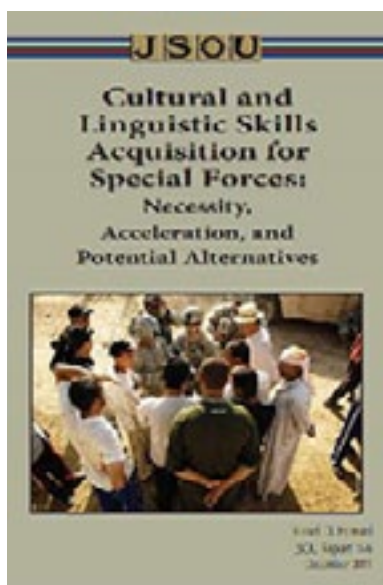
## Oman: The Present in the Context of a Fractured Past

*by Roby C. Barrett*

*Issue Date: August 2011 (JSOU Report 11-5)*

Dr. Roby Barrett's study of some 200 years of the Sultanate of Oman's dynastic history puts into context the last four decades of the Sultanate's history. It answers the question of whether Oman has changed fundamentally from a nation fraught with instability and conflict to one of peace and stability. Barrett's analysis of modern-day Oman will help the reader avoid misinterpreting the country's present condition on the basis of Oman's largely tumultuous past, which often featured conflict and competition for wealth and power. Dr. Barrett's two most recent monographs, this work on Oman and

his earlier study "Yemen: A Different Political Paradigm in Context", are bookends that will provide the SOF reader with a deep understanding of the historical context which has resulted in the southern Arabian region of today.



## Cultural and Linguistic Skills Acquisition for Special Forces

*by Russell D. Howard*

*Issue Date: December 2011 (JSOU Report 11-6)*

Brigadier General (Ret) Russ Howard articulates the need for SOF to develop language and cultural skills capabilities that reflect the wider range of locales and ethnic groups in which SOF engage while carrying out their diverse missions. General Howard outlines various definitions of culture and highlights the relationship between cultural understanding and the ability to predict behavior on the ground—an invaluable asset for a SOF operator. Drawing on his experience leading the Special Forces Language School, General Howard explores the relationship between learning a language and culture,

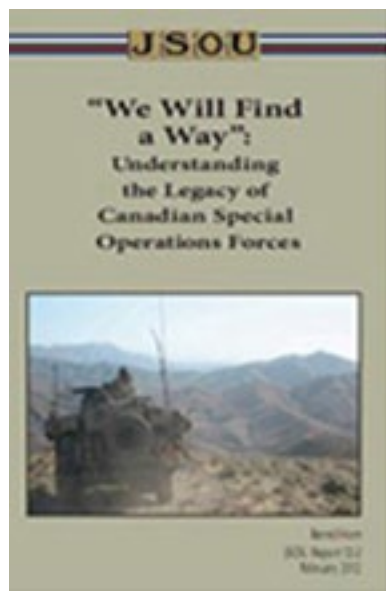
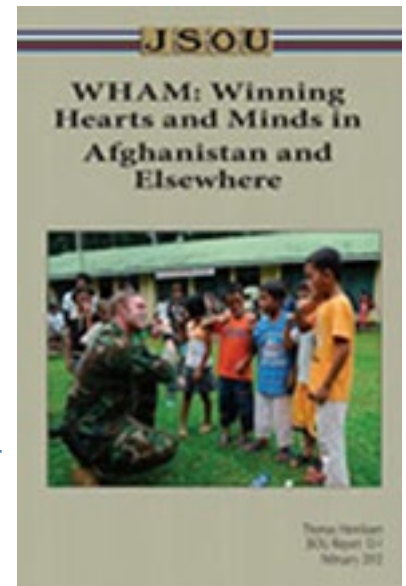
highlighting the implications for SOF. As USSOCOM and SOF rebalance the force for long-term deployments in complex operating environments, this monograph is an important contribution to the discussion of how language and cultural skills capabilities should be defined, prioritized, and developed.

# WHAM: Winning Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan and Elsewhere

by Thomas Henriksen

Issue Date: February 2012 (JSOU Report 12-1)

Dr. Henriksen argues that America needs to get back to the basics of counterinsurgency lest it bankrupts itself in nation-building and reconstruction projects that are driven from the top, not the bottom. Citing tremendously expensive “Winning Hearts and Minds” efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, he hypothesizes that “WHAM operations must be waged with much less expenditure of U.S. dollars in the years ahead.” He offers Britain’s frugal victory in Malaya as one example of a low budget counterinsurgency success that started with protecting the people, over time formed a representative government, and linked the people and their support to that government. Economic development was part of the strategy, but it was a supporting and complementary effort. It wasn’t a major effort in and of itself.



## “We Will Find a Way”: Understanding the Legacy of Canadian Special Operations Forces

by Bernd Horn

Issue Date: February 2012 (JSOU Report 12-2)

Colonel Bernd Horn’s monograph on the legacy of Canadian Special Operations Forces (SOF) highlights the colorful history and heritage of SOF in a vital partner nation. Horn reaches back to the 17th and 18th centuries with the Canadian Ranger tradition. He recounts Canada’s entry into World War II and its SOF experience with the British-led Special Operations Executive. He highlights the First Special Service Force, in which Canadians and Americans trained together in Montana and fought alongside each other, earning the moniker “Black Devils” from the Germans. Colonel Horn then brings readers to the present day. This is a brief but exciting recap of Canadian SOF history that not only enriches our understanding of a key ally, but also highlights the historic bonds and military experiences that our two great nations share.

# *The Sovereignty Solution: A Commonsense Approach to Global Security*

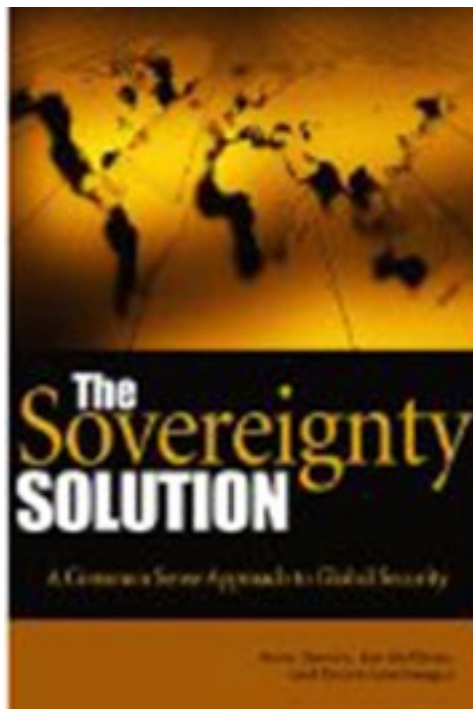
by Anna Simons, LTC Joe McGraw, and LTC Duane Lauchengco  
Naval Institute Press ISBN/SKU: 9781612510507

If terrorists were to strike another major city, what would the United States do? Aside from the dedicated first responders, Americans would cast about for whom to blame. In such a vitriolic atmosphere, what would our national response be? Who would be the target? Given our current national strategy, what type of American response *should* the rest of the world expect?

The United States has never articulated a clearly stated position on national defense: respect our sovereignty and we will respect yours. In *The Sovereignty Solution*—a radical yet commonsensical approach to recalibrating global security—an anthropologist and her Special Forces coauthors discuss what the United States could actually do to restore order to the world without having to engage in either global policing or nation building.

**Anna Simons** has a PhD in anthropology from Harvard University and is a Professor of Defense Analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School. **LTC Joe McGraw** and **LTC Duane Lauchengco** are both graduates of the United States Military Academy as well as NPS, and are U.S. Army Special Forces officers serving with two different Special Forces groups.

“Counterinsurgency by nation building is concurrently official U.S. doctrine, an evident case of military malpractice, and the imperialism of fools... This book is a valuable



contribution because it describes a perfectly sound alternative to the current U.S. military conduct.”—**EDWARD N. LUTTWAK**, military strategist and historian; author of *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*

“Like an unexpected wet mop in the face of tired complacency, *The Sovereignty Solution* works on the receptive mind as a pry bar works on a tightly sealed box. Written with courage and passion, this is a book whose often counterintuitive clarity shakes entombed assumptions like an earthquake. Whether you end up convinced or not, you will never think about American national security the same way ever again.”—**Adam Garfinkle**, editor of *The American Interest*

“While one can disagree with them, the authors make a strong case for a U.S. strategy that leaves other countries alone to live as they wish unless they attack our sovereignty. The beauty of the strategy is its stark simplicity. As important, the three authors work daily with U.S. military officers, and they cannot mask their frustration and anguish over national leadership that sends young Americans into combat without even having the guts to seek formal declarations of war, and without operationally clear criteria for success. The authors care, and so should we all.”—**The Honorable James G. Roche**, 20th Secretary of the U.S. Air Force

# Call for Submissions

The Combating Terrorism Exchange journal (CTX) accepts submissions of nearly any type. Our aim is to distribute *high quality international* analyses, opinions, and reports to military officers, government officials, and security and academic professionals in the world of counterterrorism. We give *priority* to non-typical, insightful submissions, and to topics concerning countries with the most pressing terrorism and CT issues. We accept submissions from anyone.

## Submission Guidelines

CTX accepts the following types of submissions, and offers the following length guidelines:

- **academic analyses** (5,000–7,000 words)
- **reports or insightful stories from the field** (2,000 words)
- **photographic essays**
- **video clips** with explanation or narration
- **interviews** with relevant figures (no longer than 15 minutes)
- **book reviews** (500–1,000 words); review essays (1,000–3,000 words); or lists of books of interest (which may include books in other languages)
- reports on any **special projects**

Submissions should be sent in original, workable format (in other words, we must be able to edit your work in the format in which you send it to us: no PDFs please!)

Submissions should be in English. Because we seek submissions from the global CT community, and especially look forward to work which will stir debate, WE WILL NOT REJECT submissions outright simply because of poorly written English. However, we may ask you to have your submission re-edited before submitting again.

## Ready to Submit?

By making a submission to CTX you are acknowledging that your submission adheres to all of the Submission Requirements listed above, and that you agree to the CTX Terms of Copyright, so read them carefully.

**Once you have met the above requirements and agree to the Terms of Copyright, you may send your submission directly to:**

[CTXSubmit@gmail.com](mailto:CTXSubmit@gmail.com)

If you have questions about submissions, or anything else, please contact: [CTXEditor@gmail.com](mailto:CTXEditor@gmail.com)

## Submission Requirements

Submissions to CTX **must** adhere to the following:

- they must be copyedited for basic errors *prior to* submission;
- citations should adhere to the *Chicago Manual of Style*;
- the work submitted may not be plagiarized in part or in whole;
- you must have received consent from anyone whose pictures, videos, or statements you include in your work;
- you must agree to our Terms of Copyright;
- include a byline as you would like it to appear and a short bio as you would like it to appear (we may use either, or both);
- Any kind of submission can be multimedia.

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